



Susan's story

Disclaimer: This is the story of a person who shared their personal experience with the Commission of Inquiry through a submission or interview. The names in this story are pseudonyms and identifying details have been removed. The person who shared this experience may not have been a witness and their account is not evidence. They did not take an oath or affirmation before providing the story.

Nothing in this story constitutes a finding of fact by the Commission of Inquiry. Instead, these stories have been published to show how people are experiencing the current child safety system in Queensland. Any views expressed are those of the person who shared their experience, not of the Commission of Inquiry.

Content warning: Some material may be distressing. These statements may include references to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, suicide, or self-harming behaviours, and may contain strong or confronting language. Some narratives may be about First Nations people who have passed away. Readers are encouraged to engage with this material in a way that supports their wellbeing.

If you would like support, please visit the Commission's Contact & Support page or reach out to a trusted person or a relevant support service.

I wish to share my lived experience as a parent who has engaged with the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. My intention is to highlight systemic issues and the personal toll of departmental practices that are inconsistent, coercive, and lack adequate empathy and practical support. With the hope that my voice can contribute to real change. My story highlights the emotional, financial, and emotional toll that current practices can have on families, particularly single parents with limited support.

From my first contact with the department, I was met with fear-based tactics, inconsistent information, and little regard for the emotional wellbeing of my children or myself. Allegations were made without full investigation, and I was not given a genuine opportunity to respond with context.

I am a working single mother who is responsible for caring for my two children, who are diagnosed with neurodiversity. Both children are fully functional with minor executive functioning and behavioural issues. I am responsible for managing all household and children's responsibilities without the support of extended family. I have always prioritised my children's safety and wellbeing to the best of my ability and as I do not have an extended support network and am not eligible for Centrelink due to my earnings, I rely on paid work and limited community services to manage parenting and finances.

For example, claims were made that one of my children had sexually assaulted their sibling - this was false and deeply distressing. Despite my repeated explanations I was treated as guilty without evidence. The case officer used personal knowledge and bias rather than acknowledging developmental stages with consideration for neurodiversity i.e. aspects of age-appropriate sexual curiosity and lack of understanding of social cues and appropriate jokes. I was also subject to a lack of open communication and transparency as the process was not explained effectively causing unnecessary stress and resistance towards the investigation.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



There was also an ineffective time lapse between transferring between teams from investigation to family support, we were left with no monitoring or communication for 8 weeks before having strict plans put in place, even though we had already shown there were no concerns. Through all of this I attempted to address my concerns and stresses with the team leader who made no effort to respond to my emails or return my calls and during the complaints process advised that she had forwarded my concerns to the CSO I was concerned about to address. This same case officer did not consult any of the professionals already involved with our family, nor did they show any understanding of our existing supports or daily routine. I would also like to mention that there has been no formal mapping through this process which has left me feeling lost and anxious as I feel I am being set up for failure due to there not being any strengths-based practice used, nor any acknowledgment of the practice implemented in our home.

The department's decisions significantly disrupted my ability to work, forcing me to cancel shifts and risk my employment. I was threatened to have my children removed with no consideration given to the impact this would have on my children, my job, or our household stability. No practical solutions were offered, and I was left to navigate the crisis alone. The emotional impact was immense: my children were frightened, confused, and distressed. I was made to feel like a criminal rather than a concerned and caring parent doing her best whilst trying to keep my family safe and provided for.

In addition to all of this I feel as though the systemic issues affecting our family were not acknowledged or addressed, such as the cost of living and lack of access and availability of supports and services are what have led us to this issue impacting on my capacity to provide adequate care resulting in me being penalised with an open case. The wider system issues affecting our lives daily, directly impacts our open case due to high stress levels impacting self-regulation caused by the cost of living, lack of appropriate childcare and costs associated with childcare.

I would also like to mention that even to this date whilst my case is still active there have been no proper supports put in place. "We need you to be okay on your own" without having addressed the issues. These issues stem from parental burn out due to raising my high needs children on my own whilst trying to navigate working and studying.

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



Recommendations for Change:

Trauma-informed practice – Child safety officers (CSOs) should be trained to engage with families using empathy, active listening with a non-judgmental approach, and to understand how to manage emotional dysregulation (flipping the lid Dr. Dan Siegel).

Improved communication – Information should be clearly explained and consistently delivered, with opportunities for parents to ask questions and receive written summaries.

Respect for parents' knowledge – Parents, particularly those raising neurodivergent children, should be heard and their insights respected.

Practical support – Staff must be equipped with accurate referral contacts and community knowledge to help parents meet expectations (e.g., after-school care that caters for children over 12, transport, mental health services, financial supports i.e. food vouchers).

Accountability and review – Mechanisms should be in place to review CSO conduct and ensure power is not being misused.

Holistic Intervention – Staff must use client empowered processes when providing interventions that view the client as a whole person, including their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing, rather than focusing on a specific issue or diagnosis.

Strengthen participation and voices of children in decision making – children of school age and older should be empowered to be actively involved in case planning, where their views are sought and listened to. They should be provided with advocates and support persons that can help them express their views without fear of repercussion.

While policies may exist to protect children, poor implementation and harmful attitudes from some staff can cause further trauma, not healing. My hope is that no other parent or child experiences what we went through. Change is not just needed - it is urgent.