



Family Inclusion Network

***Our children need to be
listened to, believed and supported***

*What parents say about residential care in
Queensland*

Submission related to Residential Care
made by the Family Inclusion Network (FIN)
to the Child Safety Commission of Inquiry

March 2026

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Residential Care Review/s in Queensland

Residential Care Review/s – 2023-2026

This section summarises the Residential Care reviews in Queensland’s child safety system from 2023 to 2026, including where and how the Family Inclusion Network (FIN) Southeast Queensland has been involved.

2023

On 10 July 2023, the then Minister for Child Safety announced a review of the state’s residential care system.

FIN advocated to have parents consulted. FIN sought feedback from our parent-members via an anonymous on-line survey and through other conversations. FIN developed a Submission to the review. (See link below.)

The **Nous Group** were engaged by the government to assist with the review: Nous spoke with some FIN parent-members in one conversation.

FIN Southeast Queensland’s Submission

“... **300-500 stakeholders** have been consulted [about the Residential Care review]. This paper, collated by FIN Southeast Queensland, delivers the **views of 11 parents**.”

“The views and suggestions of these 11 parents are insightful, pragmatic, and empathetic. Parents hold a unique place in systemic reviews.”

“With parents’ views in such minority, it is difficult not to conclude that, despite enormous strides forward in the past five years, “the system” continues to have a bias and a value set that does not acknowledge parents and families as stakeholders in their children’s lives.”

Family Inclusion Network (FIN)
Input from Parents – Queensland Residential Care System Review
6 October 2023

<https://d2yuko1qrktt9v.cloudfront.net/live/images/FINseq-Submission-Residential-Care-Review-2023.pdf>

2024

In February 2024 the “[A Roadmap for Residential Care in Queensland](#)” was released by the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services.

During the 2023 and 2024 processes of Residential Care review and re-design, FIN and parent members advocated regularly to be invited into conversations as a stakeholder.

Our **highlights** were being included in cross-stakeholder roundtables and to present at sector-workshops. The **low point** was the exclusion of FIN from the steering group about the Residential Care Roadmap reforms.

2025

In May 2025 the government announced a Commission of Inquiry to be led by Paul Anastassiou KC, with broad Terms of Reference (ToR) – beginning with a commitment to “**reforming the Residential Care System**”.

The Family Inclusion Network (FIN) Southeast Queensland commends the following recommendations. These represent those previously gathered and as well as some additional considerations from our on-going conversations with parents over the subsequent years.

Anastassiou Commission of Inquiry – Terms of Reference (excerpt)

The Commission of Inquiry’s terms of reference will be:

- A. Reforming the Residential Care System: Investigate models of care and the factors contributing to the growth and reliance on a billion-dollar residential care sector, including:
 - i. Analyse residential care in the historical context since the Carmody Inquiry and the increase in the use of Individual Placement Support Services and residential care.
 - ii. Investigate contemporary models around the world for the delivery of residential care, with a focus on best practice to support children who are more at risk.
 - iii. Consider what constitutes Quality of Care in both licensed and unlicensed providers, including from the perspectives of children and young people.
 - iv. Analyse contemporary models for licensing care providers.
 - v. Investigate the current state of the market of residential care providers operating under not-for profit and for-profit models.
 - vi. Analyse previous Queensland government procurement and contracting process for residential care providers to identify opportunities to improve efficiency, transparency and accountability.

[This excerpt only relates to the Residential Care elements of the Terms of Reference. [See full ToR here.](#)]

List of Recommendations from parents regarding Residential Care

1. Put children’s mental and emotional wellbeing first

Parents describe deep concern about their children’s safety, trauma and mental health while in residential care. Many feel their children were expected to cope with overwhelming situations without adequate emotional support.

“The children and their mental and emotional health and wellbeing should be everyone’s top priority. They are the victims.”

“Being placed in resi care with 24/7 carers that continually change would be so overwhelming for a child.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- Accessible, continuous mental health and therapeutic support
- Trauma-informed care at every stage
- Children to be listened to, believed and supported

2. Genuinely include parents as partners at every stage

Parents want to be recognised as key people in their children’s lives and to be involved with the process – including having a choice to be involved if their child/ren are in Residential Care. Parents describe feeling powerless, excluded and disrespected, even when they are willing and able to be involved.

“As a parent – it’s like watching that one bad influence on your child... only that ‘bad friend’ is the Department or the resi care. The parents are in the lose-lose position looking on.”

“Get told by the CSO about their human rights... but ‘your parents have no rights.’”

(Parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- Formal recognition of parents as stakeholders
- Genuine involvement in planning, decision-making and review
- Respect for parents’ ongoing role in their children’s lives

3. Invest earlier to prevent children entering residential care

Parents consistently say families needed support much earlier. Many believe residential care became the default option because help arrived too late, or not at all.

“Have a completely different approach to child protection in general. Putting carers into a home instead of a residential could help that family and particularly the child significantly.”

“Send home all those kids with caring and diligent involved parents... we need to do better as a state.”

(Parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- Earlier, practical family support where and when parents need it
- Better alternatives to residential care – including intensive in-home support

4. Support meaningful family connection and co-parenting

Parents describe being isolated from their children in residential care. Many feel blocked from everyday involvement and meaningful contact, even when it would benefit their child.

“I have been extremely isolated as a parent when the carers do everything for my children and I have no input.”

“More interaction with the child’s family. More of a co-parenting situation.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- Fewer unnecessary restrictions on family contact
- Co-parenting approaches where safe
- Recognition that family connection is protective

5. Treat reunification as a supported process, not an endpoint

Parents are clear that returning home is not the end of their family’s experience. Without ongoing support when children return home, families struggle to rebuild trust, repair trauma, and help children stabilise.

“You need a lot more support once the children have come back. They need ongoing therapy to repair and to help with the life skills they’ve missed.”

“Reunification planning is interfered with, not supported.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for

- Dedicated and specialised reunification planning from the start
- Ongoing therapeutic and practical support after return home
- Recognition that healing takes time

6. Fix communication across the system

Poor communication is one of the most consistent experiences spoken about by parents. Families describe not being informed, not being listened to, and not knowing who to trust.

“Communication. Department guidelines say this should occur but in reality it does not.”

“Eighteen months of my daughter in resi and we’ve never even met the resi youth workers.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- One consistent contact or navigator
- Clear, honest and timely information
- Family-inclusive communication as standard practice

7. Make residential care safer and more humane

Parents describe their experiences or views of residential care as – unstable, institutional and sometimes frightening for children. Frequent staff changes and lack of safety undermine children’s sense of security.

“My children said it felt like jail.”

“When they cried they weren’t comforted — they were told to deal with it.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for:

- Safer, more stable, home-like environments
- Fewer moves and disruptions
- Environments that reduce, not compound, trauma

8. Strengthen training and support for residential care workers

Parents **strongly and frequently recognise the difficulty of the work and value skilled workers**. But parents think there are gaps in training, supervision and accountability that directly affect children.

“Training, training and more training. Workers need the tools to understand the complicated issues these kids have faced.”

“Staff are not trained, they burn out quickly, and children suffer.”

(parents 2023)

Parents ask for

- Better training in trauma-informed and ‘relational practice’
- Stronger workforce support and retention
- Accountability and proper oversight

Additional material

Is “there is a place for residential care”?

Parents understandably have various views on this question. For some, Residential Care was and/or is necessary for the needs of their child. Others strongly believe that Residential Care should never be used. Regardless of their view, parents listen to each other respectfully, and always deliver unique insights. These must be included as the Commission’s recommendations are considered, and implementation is designed.

Early support – as well as reunification services

From the beginning of these reviews, FIN maintained that the reforms must be broader than ‘residential care’, and must include actions related to **keeping families together**.

Some of the previous review’s consultation documents stated “the average investment over 12months for the number of children in residential care as at 30 June 2023” is **\$417,470 per young person**.

To directly quote parents, we must “*have a completely different approach to child protection in general. Putting carers into our homes instead of a residential could help that family and particularly the child significantly*”...

“Financially it would be better to support families with live-in carers. Better care. Less traumatic. Saves money.”

FIN reiterates calls for a whole-of-government commitment to increased and improved early support for families, and for improved reunification policies and practices.

Supporting families early means proactive integrated and local responses that offer combinations of family support and case management services; maternal and child health; early childhood learning and care; and stable affordable housing. These will result in the best outcomes for children, parents, extended family, and community. And it will reduce the need for residential care and foster care placements, and ultimately reduce the load on the statutory system.

It is the humane approach but it is also the financially responsible approach. Successive studies show the cost-benefit of supporting families early – where and when they need it. Cost-benefit ranges from a saving of \$2 to a saving of \$19 for every dollar spent on prevention and early interventionⁱ

FIN suggests parents be supported to participate in steering groups, design, development, implementation and evaluation of Residential Care and all other reforms stemming from the Inquiry’s recommendations.

Health, wellbeing and therapeutic support – during and after

Parents care deeply for their children and a common theme heard by FIN over decades is the desperation parents feel when trying to advocate for the health and wellbeing (including education) of their children while they are in care.

FIN applauds the actions that will ensure **children and young people are listened to**.

We encourage increased investment in **community-based mental health responses – prioritising supports and treatment for young people at risk of entering or who have recently entered care**.

Again, FIN suggests parents should be involved steering groups, design, development, implementation and evaluation. (Parents were consulted for several parts of the previous Residential Care Reviews, however the findings of many consultations are not known. These should be published and/or explicitly used in the findings for the current Inquiry.)

Parents have said:

- *“Resi has been good for my child. There was a lot of trauma behaviour. It's 24/7 with [their] behaviour and needs to be watched and responded to.*
- *“You need a lot more support once [the children] have come back. They need ongoing therapy to repair and to help with the life skills they've missed.”*
- *“The children and their mental and emotional health and wellbeing should be everyone's top priority. They are the victims. They need to have emotional support throughout this very difficult process and they should be entitled to receive information about what's happening to them.”*

Communication – and the inclusion of parents and family

A major theme from parents is communication, and the inclusion of parents and family at all stages.

“There needs to be one person, a mentor or a navigator that is able to be there in the middle. Some independent person that can communicate quickly and clearly with all of us. From beginning to end.” (Parent)

As stated, FIN advocates for parents to be involved in reform design and implementation. The views and suggestions of parents are always insightful, pragmatic, and empathetic – parents hold a unique place in systemic reviews.

Parents say:

- *“From that first moment, can there be an initial handover involving the parents? Even though it would be extremely difficult for all involved.”*
- *“More interaction with the child's family. More of a co-parenting situation. I have been extremely isolated as a parent when the carers do everything for my children, I have no input.”*
- *“Communication. Department guidelines say this should occur but in reality it does not.”*
- *“...you get thrown like a like a tennis ball, one side of the court to the other, to the point where your children are so frustrated and so upset and they do act out.”*
- *“Reduce the strict rules around who can visit etc to make it more family friendly - contact could happen at their house for example. I didn't get to see my kids houses as I wasn't allowed to go there.”*
- *“Having family visit is an important step. I have been treated very badly by some of these carers - they need to understand the trauma associated with removal from a family and how it disrupts the family relationships. They should be a part of re-creating those bonds.”*

Physical space

Like most other stakeholders in the review – parents spoke of the need for improved physical spaces and a home-like feel.

“A family room. A space, whether it's outdoor, whether it's indoor, that we can visit. Like a normal home. Kids having that stability of being able to have people over – and everyone being connected.”

Skilling the residential care workforce

Parents' support skilling this vital workforce while it cares for children and young people.

Parents say:

- *“Training, training and more training. I also believe workers need to be properly compensated for what, if done effectively, can be not only difficult but rewarding as well.”*
- *“...the workers are not trained to deal with difficult issues.”*
- *“Workers need to be given the tools necessary to help them to understand the varied and complicated issues that kids in residential care have faced.”*

Examples: Cost-effectiveness of Prevention and Early Intervention examples:

“Early intervention has been shown to achieve, at relatively modest cost, changes to prevent harms that are very expensive to remediate... However, this does not mean that any kind of intervention will make a difference. Early intervention programs tend to be short term, underfunded and ill-focused. Research demonstrates that, to be effective, early intervention programs must be long term, evidence based and comprehensive.” **University of NSW**
https://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/42_Report_QCOSS_ReviewPaper.pdf

“A long term follow up evaluation of the 1960s Perry Preschool Project in the US found that the program had produced a saving to the community of \$13 for every dollar invested (Schweinhart 2004). There is equally impressive evidence of the long term financial return from other US projects before the 1980s, such as the Elmira Prenatal/Early Infancy Project and the Seattle Social Development Project (Homel 2005).” **Australian Institute of Criminology**
<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm54>

“To support better outcomes for children and families, modelling completed by SVA (based on the available 2017-18 financial year data) indicated that additional investment of approximately \$150 million every year in targeted early intervention programs would prevent up to 1,200 children entering out-of home care or progressing to residential care every year.” **Social Ventures Australia**
<https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Keeping-families-together-through-COVID-Report-Summary-2020.pdf>

“Significant progress in lifelong health promotion and disease prevention could be achieved by reducing the burden of significant adversity on young children in the first 2000 days (five years).” **Micah Projects**
[20231009_webfirst2000days.pdf \(micahprojects.org.au\)](https://www.micahprojects.org.au/20231009_webfirst2000days.pdf)