

Communique – Queensland First Children and Families Board meeting

21 & 22 March 2024

The Queensland First Children and Families Board (QFCFB) Co-chairs Aunty Rachel Atkinson and Kieran Chilcott welcomed members to the first QFCFB meeting for 2024.

Deidre Mulkerin, Director-General, Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS) spoke to DCSSDS priorities and progress to date, including: the new integrated client management system UNIFY going live from July; changes to the intake process including the First Nations Intake Officer trials to better support families' needs, and the ongoing statewide expansion of delegated authority now delivered in 12 locations across Queensland. The Director-General advised of the Cultural Wellbeing Conference with 260 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander DCSSDS staff on 26 & 27 March, a significant first step in DCSSDS Reframing the Relationship action plan.

Michael Currie, Co-chair, Family Matters Queensland (FMQ), advised the first Family Matters Leadership Group meeting for the year will be held in April. Priority for 2024 is to focus on collective advocacy of membership across the sector. Michael confirmed SNAICC nationally are no longer supporting the Family Matters campaign however will continue the annual national performance reports.

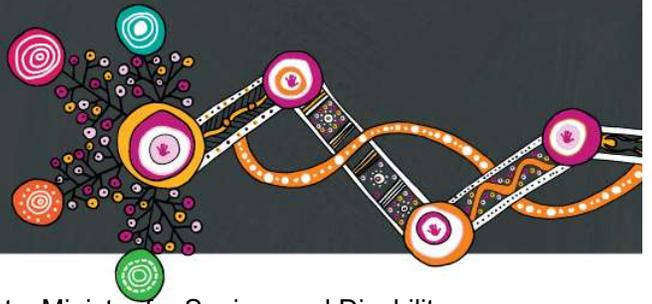
Ron Weatherall, Executive Director, Indigenous, Strategy and Partnerships, DCSSDS updated members on the implementation of Breaking Cycles 2023-25, including the development of a formal Partnership Agreement (Action 1.1) between DCSSDS, QFCFB, FMQ, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), and Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and Arts (DTATSIPCA).

DCSSDS Investment and Commissioning team sought members' advice on proposed Commissioning Reform. Members noted consultation being undertaken with First Nations Council, QFCFB and more broadly on the guiding principles for 'First Nations First Choice' Policy. Guiding principles aim to be consistent, community centered and self-determining. Members agreed and highlighted the need for principles to have high expectations with a focus on quality, excellence and accountability, and a strong need to shift power imbalance and more shared decision making.

Natalie Lewis, Commissioner, Queensland Child and Family Commission (QFCC) presented the Principle Focus Report including the 2022-2023 Statewide and Regional snapshots of over-representation in the statutory child protection system via the PowerBI dashboard. With the support of DCSSDS the QFCC aims to report quarterly on Statewide and Regional data to highlight the progress towards eliminating over-rep in child protection system.

Members noted the Wellbeing Domains project being led by First Nations Co, and key themes identified in the interim report based on engagement with Family Wellbeing Service providers. Stage Two of the Family Participation Program (FPP) is currently being undertaken by Winangali Pty Ltd, with the final evaluation report due 30 June 2024.

Jason Kidd, Executive Director, DTATSIPCA briefed on Closing the Gap and the Truth Telling and Healing Inquiry. Members noted the expression of interests for Inquiry members and the Institute Council closed on 8 January, selection processes are ongoing.



The Honourable Charis Mullen MP, Minister for Child Safety, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister Multicultural Affairs, acknowledged the critical role of QFCFB to inform government priorities and reforms. Minister Mullen expressed support for QFCFB priorities:

- Review of the QFCFB Terms of Reference with a focus on authorising parameters;
- A Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner with full powers of inquiry
- Blue card reform to eliminate barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care (in line with QFCC report) , and
- Greater promotion of the Our Way strategy across government to foster greater collective action to eliminate the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in child protection in Queensland.

Statewide Operations, DCSSDS, updated members on the early success of the First Nations Intake Officer Trial. Members discussed the possibility of this work being outsourced to the community-controlled sector in the future and requested that SWOPS keep the board updated on future trial locations and dates.

Pele Ware and Loretta Crombie, Youth Justice updated members on the Youth Justice reforms including the 'On Country' program evaluation. Youth Justice is in the early stages of determining what the 'on country' program may look like going forward and is keen to work with the QFCFB and ACCO's around the programs design. Members requested Youth Justice provide further information and data on dual order clients and additional data that could be used for the Our Way dashboard in relation to prevention of children entering the YJ system.

DCSSDS, Unify Team Debbie Jensen and Malcolm Trotter together with Office of Chief Practitioner staff members Victoria Vanhoudt, Director and Gavin Power, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice Leader briefly discussed cultural support plans and provided a demonstration of the Unify program. Members noted Unify will go live in July, however raised some concerns in relation to consent and confidentiality. Unify Team confirmed security controls are in place and the department has refined the information collected in the system to ensure only critical information is recorded.

Kate Connors, Deputy Director General, DCSSDS together with Kylie Phipps, QATSICPP updated members on placement reform activities including the review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in residential care, which found that (point of time in Sept 23):

- 32% of children in resi care are under 12 years
- 325 children not placed with siblings, and
- 181 children on interim orders.

Co-designed and implemented with the QATSICPP, delegated authority continues to be expanded across Queensland. Helen Wright, Executive Director, DCSSDS and Candice Butler, QATSICPP confirmed that there are currently 197 children with delegations through 11 organisations statewide. Thirty-two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been reunified in 3 years since DA commenced, with plans to introduce more locations (i.e. Bundaberg, Moreton Bay, Fraser Coast and Cairns) and expand the types of delegations.

The next QFCFB meeting is scheduled to be held **4 & 5 July**. For more information in relation to QFCFB membership and previous communiques, visit [QFCFB webpage](#).

Queries can be emailed to the QFCFB Secretariat to qfcfbsec@cyjma.qld.gov.au.