

Queensland First Children and Families Board 9 & 10 October 2024 - Communique

The Queensland First Children and Families Board (Board) met in Meanjin (Brisbane) on 9 & 10 October 2024 to provide strategic oversight and advice on the implementation of the Breaking Cycles action plan and priority actions.

The Director-General, Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services (DCSSDS), Deidre Mulkerin briefed the Board on the TTHI initiative including her participation in a truth-telling session on 24 September and shared her thoughts and reflections with members. The DG spoke to the DCSSDS TTHI submission and the role of the Board's strategic advice and direction in considering her address. The Director-General acknowledged that the current overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in child protection is the result of the legislation, policy and practice of the past. DCSSDS received a notice to provide more information regarding *Our Way* and reforms to child safety, and invited interested members to review future submissions, or alternatively make their own as individuals or as a group. The Director-General reassured members that feedback from Cairns stakeholders at the July meeting calling for greater integration of services to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families was a priority for DCSSDS and other government partners.

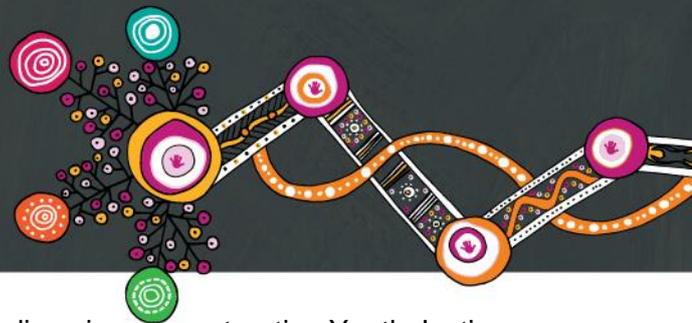
Members agreed to support and inform future DCSSDS submissions, though made clear that it is DCSSDS' responsibility to investigate and own the history and impact of its past actions. Concerns for the impact on mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples making submissions and listening to truth-telling were raised with Directors-General DCSSDS and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communications and the Arts (DTATSIPCA), Clare O'Connor, noting the TTHI process may be re-traumatising for individuals and communities, and that appropriate resourcing and support must be provided. Director-General, DTATSIPCA committed to raise these concerns with TTHI Chair, Joshua Creamer, on behalf of the Board.

Commissioner Natalie Lewis, Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) shared highlights from QFCC's *Annual Report 23-24* and thanked members for their leadership and advocacy through the *Our Way* strategy, noting positive achievements this year such as the establishment of a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People and the significant changes to remove Blue Card requirements for kinship carers.

Members welcomed changes to Commissioner Lewis' legislative right to request additional information from DCSSDS from 1 October to inform the QFCC's work, including to review Permanent Care Orders made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Commissioner Lewis will utilise these powers to conduct case-reviews on all permanent care orders and analysis of decisions made by DCSSDS to inform final report to be released by February 2025.

Regarding recent legislative changes which remove the requirement for kinship carers and adult household members to hold a Blue Card, DCSSDS advised activities underway to co-design a new Kinship Carer screening framework that maintains sufficient safeguards for children, while enabling a nuanced approach to assessing the risk a person may pose to a child to whom they are kin. QFCFB look forward to providing input and guidance to the development of the framework, noting the QFCC will provide oversight and monthly monitoring.

Members emphasised their ongoing collective concern regarding current legislation and policy approaches which drive the increasing incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



children and young people. There remains a real need for diversionary, restorative Youth Justice programs. Commissioner Lewis confirmed that the QFCC shares these concerns, and changes to legislation in Queensland breach human rights – this is a core issue in the upcoming QFCC report *Annual Child Rights in Queensland* which will be tabled with the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

Deputy Director General, Phillip Brooks, provided an update on *Breaking Cycles* actions led by Department of Education (DoE). Members raised various concerns including:

- support for students who disengage due to bullying, racism and/or safety risks in their community
- ensuring that children and young people who do not fit with the traditional education system do not disengage and at risk of contact with the justice system
- future investment in education engagement programs – DoE needs to ensure that providers are qualified to provide cultural development
- education for children and young people in youth detention; and
- potential changes to Queensland curriculum that may erase pre-colonisation history.

Board members were pleased to hear a shared decision-making framework is being developed to support more State schools to genuinely work with local community leaders, parents and students to identify and implement strategies to improve engagement, attendance, academic achievement and completion of Year 12. Phillip reassured members that Queensland will continue to teach 65,000 years + of history, including how the history of colonisation impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today. Lesson plans and guidance for schools on how to teach this history are currently being trialled, led by First Nations Principal.

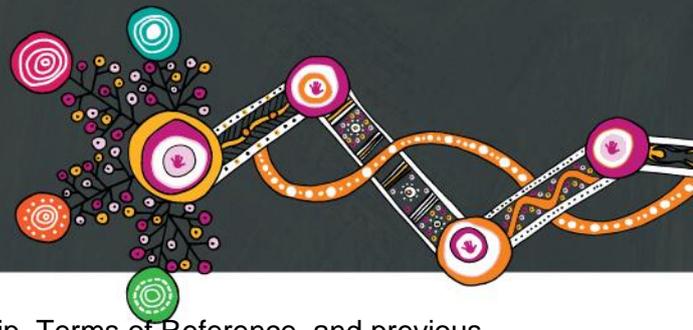
Regional Executive Director for Brisbane Moreton Bay (BMB), Bernadette Harvey and Indigenous Practice Leader, Greg Upkett, provided an overview of the BMB Regions' initiatives underway through their Cultural Humility framework to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, children, and families. Members reiterated the importance of culturally responsive leadership, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and doing aren't oppressed in decision-making for families.

In September, the QFCFB endorsed DCSSDS' *First Nations First Choice Policy* (Policy). The Policy sets best practice to the design, implementation, and evaluation of commissioning practices, including place by place regional planning to ensure commissioning practices meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Ellenah Mackie, Senior Executive Director, Investment and Commissioning provided an update on commissioning reform with members noting that DCSSDS has reached proportional investment in intensive family support funding to ATSIcco, namely:

- investment in ATSIcco has increased by \$39.9M in the past two years; from \$79.8M (2021-22) to \$119.7M (2023-24).
- number of funded ATSIcco service providers has risen from 36 (2021-22) to 44 (2023-24).

Co-chair Keiran Chilcott urged DCSSDS to be flexible in their approach to supporting and expanding the sector, noting that smaller organisations may be at a disadvantage to prove they're able to deliver, without start-up capital, infrastructure or demonstrated experience.

The final QFCFB meeting for 2024 is scheduled to be held in Brisbane on **10 & 11 December 2024**.



For more information in relation to the Board's membership, Terms of Reference, and previous communiques, visit [QFCFB webpage](#). Queries can be emailed to the QFCFB Secretariat qfcfbsec@cyjma.qld.gov.au.