

Child Protection

About the Child Protection Sector

Child protection services provide support to vulnerable families, and placement, residential care or therapeutic services to children and young people who have been removed from their families. The Department of Communities, Child Safety Services provides statutory child protection services in Queensland.

A range of services are required to respond to the different levels of support needs of the child or young person and provide stable, quality care within a Child Safety Services framework.

83 non-government organisations are funded to deliver 279 services or programs to children, young people and families throughout Queensland.

There are 76 residential services funded with an additional 85 or 90 to come on line very quickly. There are between 15 and 20 organisations traversing private and non-government enterprises. Improvements need to be made in relation to the consistency across private and non-government agencies in understanding and implementing child protection services.

Placement services, also known as alternative care or out-of-home care services, provide places and support for children and young people who are unable to live at home. The types of services that fall under placement services include: foster and kinship care; specialist foster care; specific response care; residential care; therapeutic residential care; indigenous safe house; supported independent living; counseling and intervention; family intervention; sexual abuse counseling and transition from care.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety directly employs over 2,500 staff. Increasing difficulties with recruitment and retention has seen the government recruit from other professions to fast track meeting its demand for professionals. They have recruited existing professionals such as teachers, police and corrective services - former public servants. Concerns are emerging because there is no coherent practice philosophy such as exists in social work practice.

Child protection services continue to report shortages of professionals such as Social Workers and Human Services professionals. Compounding these shortages is new graduates of these degrees appear not to have the required skills for the sector and often have unrealistic expectations of working in the sector. Consequently, many new graduates are leaving the sector within twelve months. In response to this, some organisations are recognising the Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family Intervention as an alternative entry qualification on condition that new employees at this level commit to completing their degree.

The expansion of the sector and the increased need to rely on the vocational level qualifications has seen an increase in demand for these qualifications.



The Department of Communities, Child Safety funded the delivery of Certificate IV in Protective Care managed through Sunshine Coast TAFE. The initial roll out of Certificate IV in Protective Care in the last five years has included a majority proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Subsequent delivery of this qualification, however, has depended on supervision by recent Certificate IV graduates from the previous cohort. Concerns have been raised regarding the ongoing development and support of supervising graduates and standards of supervision in the workplace. Further support and incentives for graduates to undertake further training would enable workplace learning and improve the quality of supervision, however shift work, limited pay and workloads reduce the likelihood of further training being undertaken.

TAFE dominates the delivery of the traineeships for Child, Youth and Family Intervention Worker – Child Protection, Family Support and Residential Care because User Choice is not available for private RTOs to deliver. There are forty-two RTOs with scope to deliver in Queensland.

Workplace delivery as part of the teaching and learning strategy means that students have to compete with other demands in a service environment – with no resources for backfill it is difficult to absorb this part of the teaching and learning strategy. The sector does not have the resources to provide a quality learning environment and some employers have indicated a bias in favour of university based education at Bachelor or higher level.

Reliance on a learning culture within a service delivery environment is a major barrier to a quality graduate. Because of service delivery demands, mentoring and workplace training is often not a priority within the service environment.

The sector has little capacity to understand and engage with the VET system. The sector needs a broker who can build capacity between VET and the sector and ensure that standards of training within RTOs and workplaces meet the needs of industry.

Backfill is a major problem for releasing workers to undertake professional development and training particularly for small organisations. This often results in staff attending training in their own time or missing opportunities altogether.

Casual staff are being increasingly employed and access to training for these workers is a major problem.

Legislative and policy reform

The many policy and legislative reforms alongside the increase in programs and increasing complexity has placed pressure on the new and emerging workforce. Some current reforms include:

- A residential care policy has been endorsed and will be implemented through enabling legislation. This will enforce minimum standards for licensees in 2011.
- Legislative changes have made it possible to change the confidentiality rules that apply regarding Child Safety Services releasing information to implement a model of care (piloting at this stage) where more information about family and young people is shared by the department and NGOs.
- The Helping Out Families initiative - \$55 million over 4 years will be established across the state following a trial in two locations. New Family Support Alliance services and Intensive Family Support Services will be key component of this Initiative.
- *Australian Government's National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-20)* is a comprehensive national approach to protecting children. The Framework has been endorsed by Council of Australian Governments. A wide

range of initiatives and policy reforms are expected to be rolled out over the next 10 years.

- A current policy and practice reform is required to address the issue of disconnection with culture, family, local community that occurs when a young person is constantly moved.

Rural and Remote

Remote locations – staff are isolated, experience a lack of support and have limited ability to develop their careers.

The mining boom has adversely affected the sector. The mining boom has impacted on the availability of housing, the capacity of local schools to provide education for families of the child protection workforce and the stability of family structure.

Other issues

The career paths in the sector are very flat. Often workers go from direct service delivery to manager without requisite professional development. So the jump is significant without a middle management layer.

Service Agreements not being renewed in a timely manner has seen workers leave employment prematurely.

Workforce Implications

There will be an exit of leadership and knowledge in coming years as the aging workforce moves to retirement.

Increase in number of jobs in the sector due to reforms and subsequent difficulties in recruitment may result in delay in new programs commencing.

The industry suffers from high staff turnover and a good deal of the training is one to one so this compromises a student's learning as supervisors change and their practice is inconsistent. There is a lack of external (to the workplace) assessment. At the moment there is a tension about workplace learning in child protection – a balance is needed to address the compromised quality of training and assessment in the workplace.

The training product does not prepare the student for the complex environment presented by child protection in Queensland. The model for service delivery relies on self reflection and understanding of complex situations.

Key Actions

The Child Protection Working Advisory Group (CPWAG) formed as a result of the Industry Leaders Group of the Child Protection Skills Formation Strategy of 2006 – 2008. CPWAG's membership is drawn from Service delivery agencies, relevant peak bodies and representatives from Department of Education and Training and Child Safety Services, Department of Community Services.

CPWAG has developed a *Child Protection Induction Kit*. A pilot is currently underway to trial and improve the induction kit for people who see themselves as operating in the child protection system. This has been necessary as the system moves to early intervention where more agencies are involved in early identification and response to child protection concerns. Child Protection needs a community sector workforce that can deal with complex family situations outside the tertiary sector.

CPWAG also acts as the monitoring group for the Certificate III in Child, Youth and Family and Certificate IV in Child, Youth and Family in the Community Services Training Plan 08 which includes the roll out of new modules depending on the pathway within protective care – government / non-government.

Other key actions recommended in relation to skilling and workforce development in the Child Protection Sector include:

- Professional development be designed and implemented for new initiatives including The Helping Out Families initiative
- Increase professional development for residential and foster carers relating to advocacy for young people (as often for young people the carer needs to advocate for the case plan to be implemented)
- Portable long service leave to be explored for Child Protection and other sectors.

- Increase industry engagement with RTOs to improve mutual understandings of what each can offer and overcome the current limitations to improve workplace learning.
- Promotion of traineeships available through VET in Schools
- Reduce reliance on third party reports and increase face to face interaction between teachers and students and their supervisors in the workplace.
- Adequately resource flexible delivery to overcome the perception and practice of that flexible delivery equals self paced learning.
- Promote the broad range of career opportunities available from the prevention and early intervention services to the more publicised tertiary sector, and the value of the work undertaken by the Child Protection Sector.
- Explore support mechanisms, practice models and workplace learning that support staff to manage the intense nature of the work
- Refocus the current policy to facilitate the development of industry benchmarks for workforce investment in attraction, development and deployment, planning and reward.
- Volunteer participation is declining and redesign of volunteer models and practices are needed.
- The service system needs to be culturally inclusive and positively discriminate to ensure that staff from cultures of linguistically diverse groups are encourage to join the sector.
- International and national policy trends to be investigate to support service and policy reform and a shift of resources to community based, primary and preventive services
- Organisational and leadership skills are required to reflect a capacity to address increasingly rapid political, economic and social change in the face of tight fiscal environment.
- Implement programs which provide opportunities to share staff and skills across boundaries, develop new models learning from these approaches in other settings, utilise multi-organisational approaches and industry collaboration to retain valued workers.
- Government purchasing policy should facilitate consortia rather than competitive approaches in thin markets.
- Regional and remote workforce shortages and isolation of child protection workers in these settings needs to be addressed
- Explore options to reduce complex governance structures resulting from complex funding mechanisms and multi-jurisdictional stakeholders

