

Policy GRAB

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From the Editor

The LNP's expert committees are getting into the swing of producing substantive policy ideas. At the same time I hope our valued members are using the information for discussion with those around them. No need to look to One Nation. The LNP builds policy on evidence and is committed to doing something about issues affecting Queenslanders.

For this edition we are indebted to Ros Bates, the Shadow Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Child Safety and Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence and Dr Daniel Thomas, the Chairman of the Child and Family committee and his team, for raising challenging issues in child protection with a clear view to solutions. The expert committees serve a valuable role in representing members' interests to parliamentarians – i.e. your interests.

Enjoy and promote the following articles:

- Update on Child Protection in Queensland - **Ros Bates MP**
- Child Protection "Red Herrings" - **Dan and Kara Thomas**
- Kids Need Nurturing Not Neglect - **Jane Gray**
- Concurrent Permanency Planning - **Kara Thomas**
- Effects and Approaches to Children's exposure to Porn - **Nicholas Nicholas** (with guest contributor **Liz Walker**)
- Child Protection as a Stand Alone Entity? - **Kara Thomas**
- Next-Generation Policy Development - **Dan Thomas**

As always, we are treated to insightful humour from our multi-talented retiring Chair of the Policy Standing Committee, Richard Williams.

Coming editions are likely to feature Education and Housing.

Paula Collins, Editor

Update on Child Protection

Ros Bates MP

I'm very pleased to be able to contribute to the LNP Child and Family Policy Committee's update for Policy Grab.

It's been a very busy time for Child Safety, especially in the past few weeks. Unfortunately, I was shocked and angered to learn of yet another child dying while waiting in a Child Safety backlog.

I was advised a six month old baby who died at Yeppoon was missed by Child Safety Officers, despite concerns being raised in January this year. His death occurred while waiting in an investigation backlog at the Rockhampton Child Safety Service Centre.

I'm sad to report that Rockhampton is in a worse state than Caboolture and staff are stretched to the limit. Secret internal data from October 2016 shows only 20 per cent of abuse reports requiring a 10-day response were actioned in time in Central Queensland.

“We need to overhaul the way child abuse investigations are carried out in Queensland if we are to reduce the backlog and end these terrible deaths”

What is worse still for abused children is that some 12 per cent of critical 24-hour cases were missed. The Labor Government is not only failing to protect Queensland children, it is putting Child Safety staff in the most stressful of situations.

The solution is clear: We need to overhaul the way child abuse investigations are carried out in Queensland if we are to reduce the backlog and end these terrible deaths.

Meanwhile, we're hearing of more Child Safety Officers quitting the troubled Caboolture area. In November 2016, we were promised the final report into the tragic death of Mason Jet Lee by the expert panel would be released in January and now it is March.

The full implications of this report and its findings are too important to be kept secret. The crisis in Child Safety goes far beyond Caboolture and we need answers. The LNP will take up the findings of the report to implement policies that fulfil government obligations to secure the safety of Queensland children.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office for any further information and to keep up to date with Ros' activities on a daily basis, please like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ros.bates or visit www.rosbates.com.au.



Ros Bates MP is the Member for Mudgeeraba and Shadow Minister for Shadow Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Child Safety and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence and Shadow Minister for Disability Services and Seniors. Ros is also a registered nurse, a survivor of domestic and family violence and mother of three children.

Child Protection Red-Herrings

Dr Daniel Thomas and Kara Thomas, Children and Youth Policy Committee

Child protection across Queensland has seen many reviews and constant promises to reform and to improve. Unfortunately, there are some common “red herrings” in the child protection space which inhibit change.

Family Rehabilitation above Child’s Needs

Failure to prioritise permanency and to place children with stable, loving families, on the basis of competing rights of violent, addicted or dysfunctional parents, is flawed.

As Signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have committed, as a society, to ensure our children are properly cared for and protected from violence, abuse and neglect.

Compassion for parents should not, and cannot, override that obligation. Children have the right to live healthy lives and reach their full potential. Such an outcome is in the interests of those children, but it is also in the interests of our society as a whole. Queensland’s Child Protection Act 1999 already states:

Compassion for parents should not, and cannot, override the obligation to care properly for children and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect.

If the chief executive is making a decision under this Act about a child where there is a conflict between the child’s safety, wellbeing and best interests, and the interests of an adult caring for the child, the conflict must be resolved in favour of the child’s safety, wellbeing and best interests.

Using “Stolen Generation” as a Safe Word

Adding to the paralysis of action is a misinformed view that acting to ensure the best outcomes for the child would create a “stolen generation”.

Let it be clear: Removal of a child from a dangerous situation by Child Safety is not based on race or the marital status of the mother. It is because of sexual abuse, physical assault or extreme neglect. To attempt to relate one with the other is not just wrong: **It is offensive.**

Adoption is Closed, Right?

Closed adoption is no longer an adoption practice in Australia.

However, it appears that perpetuating this myth works well for many special interest groups. Since the 1980s, adoption has followed the “Open Adoption” model: This is the modern and common practice also used by the US, and the UK.

Research has found that the Open Adoption model does not have the grief, loss and identity issues associated with some cases from the closed adoption era.



Dr Daniel Thomas, PhD is Chair of the Children and Youth Policy Committee, Volunteer speaker for ThinkUKnow and Foster Carer. Professionally, Daniel is the Australia Lead, Commercialisation and Investment for a large ICT firm and specialises in bringing innovative products to market.



Kara Thomas RN MA (International and Community Development) is a member of the Child Safety Policy Committee, Mother, Nurse, Foster Carer and currently works as the Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy at Cherish Life Queensland.

Taking Kids Away Too Early?

For decades child safety policy has been guided by the ideas of minimal intervention, family support, and removal as a last resort, with the threshold for removal now set at the extremely high “**significant** risk of harm”. Suggesting the state has been too quick to remove children is wrong. The real problem is a chronic lack of timely decision making around permanency solutions for children.

What is good Parenting?

The department routinely states: How do we decide what is “good enough” parenting?

This has already been answered by the current system. To become a foster or kinship carer, the state requires a person to demonstrate a certain acceptable level of care and provision.

If there is a basic level required for children in state care, this level should be expected on return home (as part of an appropriate reunification program).

It’s a “Complex Issue”...

In light of the overwhelming body of evidence-based research submitted to the Carmody inquiry, as well as presented to the government over the last decade, the appeal to “complexity” can no longer be used to prevent analysis, accountability and action.

It is important that we listen to evidence based research, listen to experience, and listen to the data above voices that insist on maintaining the status quo.



Kids need nurturing not neglect

Jane Gray

Child Protection in Queensland reflects a policy and ideological culture that is commonly referred to as a 'reunification as all costs' approach. Reunification where it is safe to do so, where parents enact genuine change is something we support. However, there should be clear limits.



Jane Gray is a member of the Children and Youth Policy Committee and a strong proponent of the belief that children deserve the best possible start in life. Jane works as technology marketing manager, and holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Digital Communications and an MBA from Melbourne University.

Queensland's own data demonstrates this. Recently when attending a Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services community review of changes to child protection legislation, shocking statistics were presented:

- The number of children in out-of-home care in 2016 increased to 8,671
- The average time a child spends in out-of-home care has increased to 5.2 years
- Children on long-term protection orders has increased to 62.2% (5,393)
- The average age of a child in care has increased to 8.8 years

The review meeting was predominantly attended by welfare organisations seeking more funds for more services. The department stated that it wanted to reduce children "drifting" in care (which means they spend their entire childhood in and out of the child protection system) but they were "not prepared to go as far as adoption".

The impact of this anti-adoption ideology is that 5,393 children in long term care, who have little chance of becoming part of a secure, loving family environment, are expected to remain in out-of-home care, which delivers these outcomes:

- 92% of children have below average reading levels
- 75% do not complete school
- 50% of homeless people come from an out-of-home care background
- 50% of children leaving care are unemployed
- 42% have more than six care placements

Adoption into a stable, loving family environment can stop the drift in out-of-home care that delivers negative outcomes.

Imagine how your own children might fare in a protection system that produces these outcomes.

Contrary to the Queensland department's policy, adoption does deliver great life outcomes for children and shouldn't be ignored as an option for children in care.

But adoption holds very negative emotions for a lot of Queenslanders.

1. An alternative, that provides a more permanent care environment for a child, is to create a new type of guardianship order, a permanent parenting order. This type of order protects a child until 18 years of age, and can't be challenged by the Department or the biological parents through the Family Court.
2. Combined with a legislative requirement that short term protection orders cannot extend beyond 12 months, to ensure children no longer "drift" in care, the committee hopes to provide a secure, loving and permanent family environment for children.

Concurrent Timely Permanency Planning

Kara Thomas, Children and Youth Policy Committee

Concurrent permanency planning should begin when a child is removed from their family under a child protection order. The goal of the intervention may be reunification. At the same time as reunification is being attempted, contingent planning needs to be undertaken in the event that reunification does not happen in child-centred time frames. Pre-planned alternative options can then be readily pursued. The aim is threefold: to reduce further harm from “drift” in care; reduce disturbance of multiple reunification attempts; and to give children a chance at a stable permanent “family”.

Evidence-based research has conclusively demonstrated that children who suffer abuse and neglect by their parents have very poor life outcomes, which are extremely costly to the individual, their community and the economy. Child maltreatment severely impairs anatomical and physiological development of the brain, leading to lifelong impairments in learning, behaviour, physical and mental health. Children who do not experience stable attachment relationships are very likely to have abnormal developmental processes and altered brain function. This severely impairs the child’s capacity to interact with others and form healthy relationships throughout life. It shapes the adults these children become, impacts their capacity to live positive, fulfilling and purposeful lives, and can lead to generations of disadvantage.

Evidence-based research has conclusively demonstrated that children who suffer abuse and neglect by their parents have very poor life outcomes, which are extremely costly to the individual, their community and the economy.

The current system, as outlined by the recent Carmody inquiry, is very heavily focused on family preservation, resulting in children lingering longer in care, subject to multiple placements and reunification attempts that often consume entire childhoods. The Carmody Inquiry, as well as the 2004 CMC Inquiry and many researchers have called for permanent care for children in out of home care to be vigorously pursued in a timely manner. Improving long term outcomes for vulnerable children begins by ensuring their right to develop to their full potential free from violence in safe and stable homes.

What policy options are available?

Reinstating the 12-month time limits originally associated with the 2008 One Chance at Childhood Initiative for Children 0-4 would be in the best interests of children. “If families involved in the program failed to address their parenting issues in 12 months, the department would cease reunification plans, recognising the importance for children to have a stable, safe home environment and a loving relationship with a primary carer.”

Alternatively, timely decisions could be implemented in a manner similar to the current NSW policy;

Where a child is removed for their protection and wellbeing, a decision about whether restoration of the child to their birth family is a realistic possibility must not take longer than 6 months for children under 2, and not longer than 12 months for all other children and young people.

Effects and Approaches to Children's Exposure to Porn

Nicholas Nicholas and Liz Walker

Top academics agree that the harms of pornography on children and young people are well researched¹, with countries now defining this issue as a Public Health Crisis.²

Children have easy, free and unlimited access to pornographic material through mobile devices, home internet, and open public Wi-Fi. This material is shaping young minds to act out adult themes, distort perceptions of how to treat others, and translates into mental health issues, problems related to violence, and disease risks.

This discussion piece is not aimed at the adult content, but more so limiting the delivery of content to children through technology-related child protection buffers. An example of successful government and private cooperation to limit inappropriate material being accessed by children is demonstrated by measures adopted within the UK³. Sky Broadband Internet Service Provider (ISP) introduced filtering by default in 2016. To date, up to 70%⁴ of Sky internet customers still have default family safe filtering in place. Content is also restricted on mobile devices, using age-verified SIMs⁵. Age-verification processes to access pornography websites are also being implemented⁶.

We are encouraging government to liaise with ISPs and tech companies to protect Australia's children from accessing pornographic material.

In Australia, we already have provision in place to assess pornographic content under the National Classification Code (May 2005)⁷. This code sets out the principles⁷ to be followed in making classification decisions:

1. Classification decisions are to give effect, as far as possible, to the following principles:
 - a) minors should be protected from material likely to harm or disturb them;
 - b) the need to take account of community concerns about:
 - (i) depictions that condone or incite violence, particularly sexual violence;

We are seeking your support to encourage the government to liaise with ISPs and tech companies to protect Australia's children from accessing pornographic material. State and federal governments have a responsibility to exercise due diligence to protect children from online harms as a matter of child protection.

In-depth details of children accessing pornography, adopting a Public Health approach, and how to implement child protection buffers can be sought from Liz Walker, Chair of Porn Harms Kids.

www.pornharmskids.org.au/

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Nicholas Nicholas, Member of the Child Safety Policy Committee and Treasurer for a charitable organisation. Professionally, Nicholas is a Relationship Manager working exclusively with Health Care professionals within one of Australia's top medical financial institutions.



*Liz Walker is an accredited sexuality educator, speaker and author. Liz is Chair of the Australian organisation **Porn Harms Kids**, addressing the harms of children and young people accessing online pornography. Liz also consults for **Culture Reframed**, the global lead in solving the public health crisis of the digital age; and is Managing Director of **Youth Wellbeing Project**.*

Next-Generation Policy Development

Dr Daniel Thomas, Chairman Children and Youth Policy Committee

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been a part of our lives for well over a generation, with roots as far back as the 1960s and 70s. In fact, just this month we celebrated the 28th anniversary of the World Wide Web. Today, we carry supercomputers in our pockets and have access to the entirety of human knowledge, though some may use it to watch YouTube videos of cats!

Technology can bring us together: it provides us with an amazing opportunity to shrink the tyranny of distance in our state. Whether in Roma, Cairns or Spring Hill, technology that brings us together enables us to be more effective and inclusive in policy development.

We recognise that good policy development is something members should be involved with. With this in mind, The Children and Youth, Family, Communities and Disability Services policy committees have instituted video conferencing technology to allow committee members to join from anywhere in the state.

*Technology now enables members, wherever they are,
to be involved in good policy development.*

We found that this broke down the distances for our members across the state, but has also allowed our Shadow Minister, Ms Ros Bates MP to attend when it would otherwise be too difficult due to geographic distance, or the vagaries of parliamentary sitting schedules. Having online, apps and conference call lines working together gives our committee members flexibility depending on their circumstances.

We are currently undertaking a second trial of new tools for joint policy development using secure collaborative workspaces and documents. Initial results have been positive and shared with the Research and Policy Standing Committees.

Using modern communications technology, our party has the great opportunity to empower and inform our members across the state. Not everyone can sit on a committee, but by using these tools, we can bring member expertise to bear on complex issues, and report back to Regions, FDCs and SECs on the work of our policy committees.

This edition of Policy Grab has been prepared by the Policy Standing Committee for the
LNP Queensland
66-68 Bowen Street,
Spring Hill Qld 4000
Ph: 07 3844 0666

Letters and comments to:
dialogue@lnp.org.au