



Queensland
Foster and
Kinship Care

Queensland Carer Exit Survey

2023-2024





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Queensland Foster and Kinship Care as the Non-Government peak body for Foster and Kinship Carers would like to take this opportunity to thank all foster and kinship carers, past and present, for opening their home and their heart to our most vulnerable children. The carer role is instrumental in providing children with the opportunity to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth. A carer's dedication and compassion truly make a difference and QFKC are immensely thankful.

QFKC would also like to further acknowledge the feedback received from 220 former foster and kinship carers across Queensland who participated in the Carer Exit Survey. We appreciate the time undertaken to participate, either in a form of a telephone interview, post survey or an online survey.

We thank you for sharing your feedback and experience with Queensland Foster and Kinship Care.

Thank you again

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Photography by Ben White

Executive Summary

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC), peak body for foster and kinship carers across the Queensland state, was founded in 1976 and is boarded by a Management Committee who are all foster or kinship carers with a combined 230 years of experience in caring.

The organisation's fundamental purpose is motivated by the desire to protect and care for children and young people who have experienced harm or is at risk of experiencing harm, hence our vision -*Leave no child in foster and kinship care behind.*

Our goal is to contribute to the development of an inclusive, responsive and fair foster care system (child protection system) and therefore, are strong advocates in ensuring the voices of foster and kinship carers are heard and valued.

The Carer Exit Interview Program occurs every financial year, June to July, to capture the voices of carers who have exited the system to share their experience and capture their voices.

Queensland Foster and Kinship Care has undertaken the role of managing the Carer Exit Interview Program for the past sixteen years to enable carers across Queensland the opportunity to share their experiences and feedback during their time as a carer.

Key Findings

The following key findings are the combined Queensland results of foster and kinship carers, further expansion on region results are provided within the report.

Across the Queensland state, 220 former foster and kinship carers provided insight on their initial decision of becoming a carer, foster carers identified their *desire to help children in need* was the main contribution to their decision. Whereas for kinship carers, this was ensuring *stability for the children and the family*.

Following on from their decision into caring, carers provided an overview on why they have are no longer an approved carer within the Child Protection system, majority of foster and kinship carers stated *reasons*

relating to child safety followed by *reasons relating to themselves and family*. Responses related to the child related factors, the following reasons were stated by foster and kinship carers:

- Other
- Behavioural difficulties

Responses related to the carer and family-related factors; the following reasons were stated by foster carers:

- Other
- Time commitments

For kinship carers:

- Other
- Impacts on extended family relationships

Reasons that state, *Other*, could range from the child turning 18 years old, a Permanent Care Order (PCO) or Long-term Guardianship Order (LTGO) being in place etc.

The Carer Exit Survey identified *positive satisfaction*, satisfied and very satisfied, of being a carer these include:

For foster carers:

- The number of children being placed with you at any one given time being reasonable
- Opportunity for you to participate in professional development
- The level of support provided to a child during the placement
- The manner in which the carer approval process was undertaken
- The level of support provided to you during the placements
- Pre-service training
- Standard training – Starting Out
- Advanced training (*also a neutral satisfaction*)
- Information provided on Child Safety's Policies, Legislation and Procedures
- Information provided about other agencies role and responsibilities
- Ability to access additional training specific to the child's needs if requested

For kinship carers:

- The arrangement for children to have contact with their parents and other family members
- Opportunity for you to participate in training specific to the needs of the children (*Kinship carers*)
- The manner in which the carer approval process was undertaken
- Your ability to have input into decisions about the child's care

For foster and kinship carers:

- The information provided to you about the child prior to placement
- The level of engagement and response you've experienced with your Foster and Kinship Care Service
- Pre-service training (*Foster carers*)
- Information provided about your role and responsibility
- Information provided to assist you with the foster/kinship care role
- Information provided about your foster and kinship care role and responsibilities
- Information about positive behaviour support strategies and acceptable discipline practices

Responses from carers have shown a dissatisfaction in the following areas:

For kinship carers:

- The level of support provided to a child during the placement
- The level of support provided to you during the placement

For foster and kinship carers:

- The level of engagement and response experienced with Child Safety

Responses from carers have shown a neutral satisfaction in the following areas:

For foster carers:

- The arrangement for children to have contact with their parents and other family members
- Your ability to have input into decisions about the child's care
- Advanced training (*also a satisfied response*)
- Hope and Healing - trauma informed approaches

For kinship carers:

- The level of support provided to a child during the placement
- Information provided about Child Safety's role and responsibilities
- Information provided about other agencies role and responsibilities
- Information about positive behaviour support strategies and acceptable discipline practices
- Your ability to access additional training specific to the child's needs if requested

- Hope and Healing - trauma informed approaches

For foster and kinship carers:

- The extent to which children and young people were provided with an opportunity to participate in decisions about their care
- Ability to appeal a decision related to you that was made by Child Safety
- Ability to make a complaint about a service provided by Child Safety
- Child Safety's handling of a Harm Report/SOC Process
- Child safety's policies and procedures for dealing with a Harm Report/SOC Process

Former carers were also provided an opportunity to share the following:

- 30% of carers would not advise a friend to become a carer (*21% yes, 26% maybe, 23% skipped*)
- 30% of carers would not consider returning to the role of a carer (*19% yes, 29% maybe, 23% skipped*)
- 27% of carers stated the experience maybe have met their expectation when becoming a carers (*24% yes, 26% no, 23% skipped*)

Common feedback received since the introduction of Carer Exit Interview Reports since 2014 shows lack of support and communication in being a challenging factor in caring for children and young people. However interestingly, the increase of behavioural and emotional needs of children are becoming another challenge when caring. This has been quite evident across the state based on the comments received by former carers.



Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the Carer Exit Survey came into effect from a Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) Enquiry in 2003 as it was recommended that every carer leaving the foster care system should have the chance to participate in an exit interview. The Department of Child Safety initially conducted the exit interviews for carers who have left the system.

At QFKC understanding and having knowledge of a carer exit is crucial for improving the retention of carers within the Child Protection System and as an organisation the knowledge was not being captured amongst this demographic. Bryan Smith, QFKC's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), completed a submission to propose QFKC (then FCQ) to undertake the Carer Exit Interview Programme for a 12-month trial. With succession, QFKC sought recurrent funding which was approved from the 1st of July 2008.

Forward to 2024, QFKC has undertaken the Carer Exit Survey for the sixteenth year and continues to obtain carer experiences in survey form. The work QFKC has undertaken to reach out to carers to have their experiences heard has created various changes within the Child Protection System utilising the evidence from carer voices in these the survey.

Exit Interview Program

QFKC has undertaken the role of managing the Exit Interview Program since 2008 to establish a report that enables carers across Queensland (QLD) the option to share their experiences and provide feedback.

In previous years, notification of a carer's exit, known as an *End of Carer Approval Notice*, is referred by Child Safety to QFKC, allowing QFKC to contact the carer to provide an opportunity to undertake the survey. However, over the years the organisation has identified that not all *End of Carer Approval Notices* for carer families who have exited the system are received.

Overcoming this limitation, Child Safety and QFKC reviewed the referral system and proposed a streamline process that allows QFKC to receive referrals simultaneously with Child Safety. This new form is now known as, the Foster and Kinship Care Exit Referral Form.

These new procedures were implemented on the 1st of July 2022, and since then these changes have improved carer referral notifications. However, there is recognition that not all exit referral forms are received every financial year. QFKC and the Department continuously collaborate to review and improve systems to ensure accurate exits are captured within the program and potentially, further increase survey participation to hear a carer's experience within the Child Protection System.

Carer Exit Survey

The Carer Exit Survey was conducted during the financial year of 2023-2024 targeting individuals who were approved as either a foster or kinship carers and in the process of exiting their volunteering status with the Child Safety.

Carers were given an opportunity to participate in the form of an online survey, paper-based, or telephone interview. The survey was designed to be completed in approximately 17 minutes (online) or 45 minutes via telephone, depending on the mode participation. The survey content consisted of 46 items which enabled further understanding in the following areas:

- About the carer
- Understanding the carer's role
- Initial reasons to becoming a carer
- Reason for discontinuation
- Communication and support
- Carer satisfaction and experience

Carer Exit Report

This report outlines the feedback from 220 carers and is sectioned into six regions across Queensland. The information and feedback are specific for each region and are further elaborated within this report.

Methodology

Survey Population and Sample

QFKC received 752 carer exit referrals from agencies across the state, this amount was the initial demographic group who consisted of foster and kinship carers who have recently exited the system. The sample group for this Exit Report were carers who were willing to participate and share their feedback in the form of a survey.

In this report, 220 former carers participated in the Carer Exit Survey, resulting a 29% participation rate of known exited carers within the financial year of 2023-2024.

Fieldwork

QFKC’s Exit Program undertakes the activities on exited carers who are notified to QFKC from agencies across the state in a streamline process. The streamline process allows QFKC to receive an exit referral simultaneously as Child Safety when a carer has decided to resign in their position.

The notification to QFKC enables the Exit Team to send through an acknowledgement letter to the carer/s advising that an Exit Referral Form has been received from their agency and inviting the former carer to provide feedback about their experience by completing a survey. The acknowledgement letter that is sent via the post provides various options for the individual to participate, these include an online survey link (QR code), paper survey or telephone interview.

After a two-three-week period, QFKC’s Exit Team follow up with the carer, where possible, to acknowledge whether the letter was received and discuss the opportunity to provide their experience and feedback. Where no contact was feasible QFKC would follow up with email.

Individuals who have requested a paper survey were posted with the survey and a pre-paid envelop for easy return. Those who have requested a telephone interview were scheduled when it was mutually agreed. All data received from the post surveys and telephone interviews were inputted into the online survey by QFKC in Survey Monkey.

| Call Outcome | Number of Individuals (%) | Notes |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Telephone Interview | 10 (1.3%) | |
| Online Survey | 202 (27%) | |
| Post Survey | 8 (1%) | |
| Non-contacts | 466 (62%) | Calls that involved the following: No response, left voicemail, incorrect details, carer deceased, or no contact details provided and other. |
| Refusals | 60 (8%) | |
| Still a carer | 6 (0.7%) | |
| Total initial sample | 752 (100%) | |



Photography by Sue Zeng