

Response to Discussion paper section on Workforce Development

By Final Year Social Work and Human Services Students (advanced child, youth and family specialisation), The University of Queensland.

March 2013.

26. Should child safety officers be required to hold tertiary qualifications in social work, psychology or human services?

Our experiences on professional placements have been that qualified human service workers are sometimes in the minority in child safety services. We believe that workers need to have the professional educational background that enables them to see the bigger picture of the family when making decisions. We believe that social work and human service qualifications provide a relevant background for this work because in these degrees we learn to see the 'grey areas' and the complexity of children and family circumstances.

We are concerned that Child Safety Services do not adequately remunerate frontline workers and that this is a factor in the agency's capacity to attract and retain professionally qualified workers. We believe that it is important that frontline workers have experience in child welfare and so we think it is important for workers to be supervised and supported to stay in the child protection field.

We believe that access to university education needs to be improved so that people from diverse backgrounds can gain the relevant qualifications for this work. Universities need to be encouraged to offer flexible and distance programs in social work and human services. The child safety authority also needs to encourage and support workers, especially workers from diverse backgrounds, to gain these professional qualifications.

Where child safety authorities offer workplace training it is important the people offering the training have professional experience in child protection work. The quality of workplace training is critical as is the need to provide workers with support (such as time away from work) to attend.

27. Should there be an alternative Vocational Education and Training pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to progress towards a child safety officer role to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety officers in the workforce? Or should this pathway be available to all workers?

We support the employment of marginalised groups in child safety services and we believe that educational pathways must be made available for people in these groups to gain access to professional qualifications. We believe workers undertaking core child protection work, such as assessments, require professional qualifications.

28. Are there specific areas of practice where training could be improved?

The key areas where training can be improved are: training in reflective practice, report writing, and provision of professional supervision. If training is offered then there must be an onus on the Child Safety Service Centres to ensure the workers can attend/ participate. Non-government agencies need better support to ensure consistent access to training for workers, especially those working directly with children, young people and families.

29. Would the introduction of regional backfilling teams be effective in reducing workload demands on child safety officers? If not, what other alternatives should be considered?

Backfilling is important for ensuring workload pressures are manageable, as our experience is that casework comes to a halt when a worker goes on leave. Youth justice has a good model of backfilling which allows for officers from nearby offices to backfill when workers are on leave. This provides for consistency of casework practice.

30. How can Child Safety improve the support for staff working directly with clients and communities with complex needs?

Funding needs to be provided to deliver services that are in the best interests of the child. Frontline workers need access to ongoing quality professional knowledge and skills particularly for responding to children and families with extreme needs. There should be better support for non-government community services to provide therapeutic care to help the children and families achieve recovery and lasting change.

31. In line with other jurisdictions in Australia and Closing the gap initiatives, should there be an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets within Queensland's child protection

Yes, the employment targets should be in line with National standards. It is important that the Child Protection authority achieves these employment targets by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access to professional education opportunities.