

Queensland First Children and Families Board

4 & 5 July 2024 - Communique

The Queensland First Children and Families Board (Board) met for the second time this year to review progress on implementation of *Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families 2017–2037* (Our Way). For the first time since the Board's establishment in 2018, Board members met outside of Southeast Queensland, with the July meeting held on Gimuy and Yirrganydji lands in Cairns, Far North Queensland.

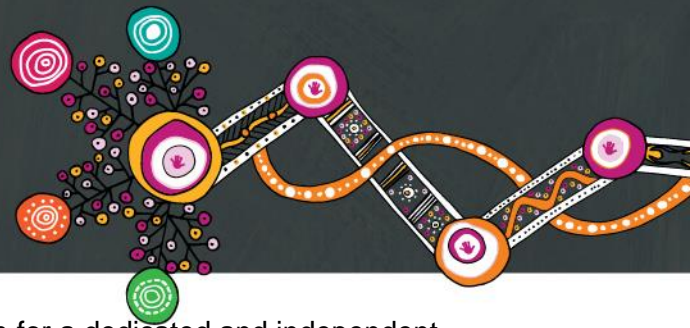
Members were privileged to yarn with Cairns community leaders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations and Department of Child Safety staff to hear first-hand about local issues and priorities. Key representatives from RAATSIC, NATSIHA, Warringu, WuChopperen, Mamu Health Services, Apunipima Cape York Health Council and Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good, were invited to share their stories with Board members about the success and challenges they currently experience working with children, families and Far North Queensland communities. Items raised by community leaders for discussion with Board members included a focus on the need for more integrated family support services and the ability to enact change through placed based and flexible services.

These local learnings are invaluable and will inform the Board's advice to government about what reforms and systemic changes are still required within the Queensland child protection system to better support our children and families and reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in contact the Queensland child protection system.

Board members also requested an update from the Honourable Charis Mullen, Minister for Child Safety, Minister for Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Multicultural Affairs on priorities including review of the QFCFB Terms of Reference to enable optimal influence by QFCFB across government to foster greater collective action to achieve the Our Way strategy goal to eliminate the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland's child protection system, and exciting changes to the Blue Card system.

In response to the Queensland Family and Child Commission recommendations regarding the Blue Card system, the Department of Justice and Attorney General recently introduced changes to the *Working with Children (risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2024* that will remove the requirement for kinship carers to hold a Blue Card and change how kin are screened and assessed to care for children – acknowledged by Board members as deeply significant to achieve transformational change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and recognises the strength of kinship systems and the collective responsibility Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold for all children.

The QFCFB has worked tirelessly since the inception of Our Way, advocating for the removal of this requirement, acknowledging the barriers the blue card system has on the ability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being able to be cared for by their kin/ family. Whilst the requirement will be removed, the safety and wellbeing of children remains at the centre of every decision. Board members continue to work closely with the Department of Child Safety, Disability Services and Seniors (DCSSDS) to develop a new fit-for-purpose framework to screen and assess kinship carers in lieu of the Blue Card requirement.



Significant progress has also been made on the campaign for a dedicated and independent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, an initiative that has been driven by the Board in partnership with Family Matters Queensland since 2016. Kate Connors, Deputy-Director General, DJAG provided an update on progress, including the Queensland Family and Child Commission's work to establish national minimum standards for commissioners in each jurisdiction across the country. DJAG and the QFCC continue to work closely with the Board to design options for an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner in Queensland. The Board emphasised that the appointment of a National and Queensland Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children is considered the benchmark of leadership for all jurisdictions in safeguarding the rights of our children. The Board expressed their gratitude to Minister Mullen, The Attorney General and Commissioner Natalie Lewis for their leadership on both the Blue Card reforms and the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner in Queensland, that will lead to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, keeping them connected to families, communities and culture.

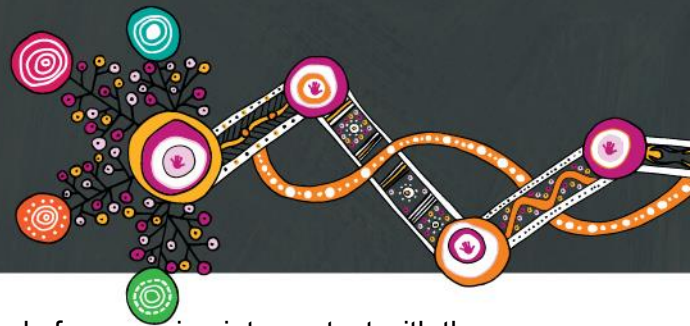
At the request of the Board, Youth Justice Director General, Bob Gee was invited to provide an update on Youth Justice reforms. Board members expressed concerns regarding government's focus on increasing capacity of detention instead of prioritising investment in preventative, diversionary and restorative justice programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. On behalf of members, Board Co-chairs will be communicating these concerns to the Honorable Minister Farmer, Minister for Education and Minister for Youth Justice and seek her attendance at the next Board meeting to discuss these concerns in more detail. The Board will also use this opportunity to discuss issues raised throughout the meeting regarding school exclusion policies and mandatory reporting decision-making amongst education staff, noting the continuing high numbers of child concern reports made to child safety from education services, with the vast majority of these being deemed unsubstantiated following investigation.

Board members reviewed the QFCFB 2023 performance report provided by DCSSDS which enables members to oversee the child protection system and monitor the progress of Our Way.

While acknowledging the performance reports are helpful to understand the system at a broad level, members requested that future reports include more context and regional perspectives to accompany the data. This will allow the Board to better understand how the systemic issues and operational practice are reflected at a local level, and how this differs across the state. It was proposed that this could include regular invitation to regional representatives and service providers to attend the Board and future meetings in different locations.

QFCFB members also reviewed the draft Breaking Cycles Partnership Agreement, an action under *Breaking Cycles 2023-2025*, that formalises an agreed way of working between QATSICPP, QFCFB, DCSSDS and the Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts (DTATSIPCA) to implement Breaking Cycles actions that embeds a new way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Members discussed the benefits of the agreement, including the potential for leveraging Closing the Gap governance groups to drive greater engagement and accountability by the Board across government to eliminate disproportionate representation in the child protection system.

QFCFB approved the agreement 'in principle' and will continue to work with parties to further refine and finalise the agreement, noting that the Board is seeking assistance from DCSSDS and DTATSIPCA to strengthen their authority to hold other departments accountable for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to ensure



families' needs are met to prevent children and young people from coming into contact with the child protection system.

The Board also reiterated their concern at the adverse community response to the outcome of the referendum, that has resulted in a notable increase in overt racism being experienced in the sector and communities. Co-Chairs welcomed progress to commence the Truth Telling and Healing Inquiry, noting it is vital that resources are directed to services which support those organisations and community members who will engage with the inquiry.

QFCFB key priorities for the next 3 months include:

- Implement the findings from review of the QFCFB Terms of Reference, enabling the board to have greater independence, authority and accountability to community.
- Identifying and communicating to government, the ATSICCO sector and communities Board strategic priorities for the next 12 months
- Continued oversight of Breaking Cycles implementation progress – including establishing co-design for the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan
- Continued advocacy for a Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner to be the single point of coordination, commitment and accountability across government, while centering the child and their rights in all government decisions.

The next QFCFB meeting is scheduled to be held in Brisbane on **9 and 10 October 2024**.

For more information in relation to QFCFB membership and previous communiques, visit [QFCFB webpage](#).

Queries can be emailed to the QFCFB Secretariat qfcfbsec@cyjma.qld.gov.au.



Board members at the Cairns meeting in July 2024 (left to right): Michael Currie, Nyoka Fetoai, Kieran Chilcott (Co-chair), Aunty Rachel Atkinson (Co-chair), Aunty Ivy Trevallion, Dion Tatow, Clinton Schultz, David Baird.