



During Child Protection Week, 2020, Parents on a Mission spoke to various stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system, to ascertain their views on working together.

Stakeholders involved:

- Parents
- Carers - Foster Carer and Kinship Carer
- Former Departmental Workers

Questions were asked about whether they thought that the different stakeholders could actually work together and what are the barriers they see to working together. These questions have been asked by Parents on a Mission, to provide the voices of lived experience of all involved.

Parents on a Missions membership includes 20% carers, 20% former Departmental staff and 60% parents, who have or have had a child protection experience.

[Case study 1 - Parent A](#)

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"It's been my experience that it's very hard to do so, I've seen it work and it's great when it does but that is very rare. Parents need the Department to understand where they are coming from. It's a scary experience, having your children removed and they expect so much when you are trying to deal with what's happened. It's a bit easier with the carers, if the carers don't act like my kids mum or dad. That's really hard for mums like me"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"CSOs need to see you as a person, not just another case"*
- *"Communication - I can never get in touch with my CSO, how can I work with her if I can't even contact her?"*
- *"It's hard to work with someone that has taken away your babies"*

- *"I get so upset and angry and instead of understanding that I'm going through hell, they just focus on what you've done wrong."*
- *"It's hard when the kids go to the carers about things now instead of me. I don't feel like their mum anymore"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"There needs to be a better understanding of what parents are going through. We are still their mum and dad."*
- *"The CSOs should be easier to contact and not judge me all the time. I'd like better communication with the carers. I need to know what's happening with my kids"*

[Case study 1 - Parent B](#)

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"I think that it's hard to expect parents to work with the people that removed their children. I guess it could work, I would've tried anything to get my little boy back. I get along with the carers, they are an older couple so it's a bit easier"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"Angry parents and workers who just see the mistakes you've made"*
- *"Distrust"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"Stop taking our kids away and try to help us instead"*

[Case study 1 - Parent C - Laura Sheenan](#)

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"I believe that stakeholders in the Child Protection system not only can work together but should be expected to, as a matter of course"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"The best interest of the child should be front and centre in everyone's mind, not personal agendas"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"It's important to let go of previous experiences and stereotypes and commit to getting to know each other"*

Case study 2 - Foster Carer for 9 years, Linda Little

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"Given the right circumstances, 100%. We all have to be on the same page"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"Sometimes the barriers are parental - where the birth parent resents the relationship between the two. The carer is 'piggy in the middle'. As foster carers we are held to a higher standard to other parents."*

Relationships between the carer and worker:

- *"Sometimes it can be very frustrating, if there are things that the kids need and the CSO is away or overwhelmed by their caseload, there can be delays. These delays really impact on the kids, so sometimes it's difficult to work with them because of these reasons."*
- *"The time it takes to have decisions made, the fact that CSOs have to run everything by the Team Leader and the fact that you can't get an answer on the same day are issues that all carers face"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"Why can't the carer go straight to the Team Leader? If the CSO is away or on leave, why can't the carer just get an immediate response?"*
- *"There's no encouragement from the Department to the parent to have a positive relationship with the carer. The Department could help to facilitate this process"*

Case study 2 - Kinship Carer for 5 years, Deborah

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"Only if a parent felt safe and they felt that the CSO wants to do everything they can to return the child"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"Power imbalance"*
- *"Parents are too angry and their pain isn't acknowledged"*

Carers working with parents

- *"There is a conflict, as some carers want to adopt the child - this can then threaten their relationship"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"Better training for CSOs - the training is better in other states (of Australia) this training is based on parents strengths. The Queensland training is more of a blame culture and it doesn't work"*
- *"Could a solution be that the carer take in the child and the parent? They would at least be together"*

Case study 3 - Former Departmental Worker for 15 years in QLD and NSW 1 year, Cheryl Budge

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"I do believe they can but someone needs to drive that. From my experience in NSW, I see everyone working together, this didn't happen when I worked in QLD. It also needs to be transparent and genuine. The best interest of the child needs to be a genuine belief"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"Not being genuine, transparent and committed to the best interest of the child"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"What gets in the way, is not having a genuine budget to work together as a team to provide for the child. They need to back it up with finances and the number of staff to do the work"*

Case study 3 - Former Departmental Worker

Do you believe that stakeholders in the QLD Child Protection system can work together?

"Asking CSOs and carers to work with parents is difficult, because they would need to be so empathetic, open and honest. The real feelings of parents would need to be acknowledged"

What are the barriers you see to working together?

- *"A CSO or carer isn't supposed to have feelings about the situation. As a CSO you are taught that parents will be angry at first but will eventually come around"*

Can you think of any solutions to overcome these barriers?

- *"CSOs need to have belief in the parental love for the child"*

- *"Separating children from their families isn't the answer and, we as workers, must find a better solution. Wouldn't it be great if we could say to parents - We don't want to judge you for what's happened. We want to help fix what has gone wrong and we need you to tell us what you need"*

As you can see, there are many different opinions from the stakeholders involved. So, what can we learn from this?

There seems to be a consensus that the stakeholders in the Child Protection system can possibly work together, with some caveats -

- Better training for CSOs on the needs of parents
- Less judgement and more compassion and understanding
- More work needs to be done on the relationships between parents and carers - 'we are a team'
- For carers - lessening red tape with the Department
- Some former Departmental staff wish they could work differently with parents but weren't able to/it wasn't ok to do so

All in all, there seems to be lessons that all stakeholders of the system need to learn, just by talking to each other about the other's needs. We need to listen to each other. We are all separate and we shouldn't be.

If we want to change things, really change things, then I think it's possible. There may be some people from all three groups who just can't, for whatever reason. The majority though, are people that **want** this to work.

Parents on a Mission wishes to thank all of the parents, carers and former staff who contributed to this study. Parents on a Mission will keep working with each cohort group, to support and help each other see life through the others lens. My goal is to change the system, from the inside out. If you would like more information about Parents on a Mission, please visit:

www.parentsonamission.com.au

Thank you,
Leanne Claussen
Parents on a Mission



*Parents helping other
parents to create positive
change in the world*