

Inquest into the death of Faith

Faith was an eight year old girl who resided with her mother, step-father and two step-sisters. She died on 28 November 2011 from multiple blunt force trauma injuries she sustained when her mother struck her repeatedly with a metal vacuum pole.

The Coroner investigated the procedures for notifications of suspected child abuse to the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Coroner Jane Bentley delivered her findings of inquest on 27 June 2014.

The Queensland Government responds to recommendations directed to government agencies at inquests by informing the community if a recommendation will be implemented or the reason why a recommendation is not supported. Further information relating the implementation of recommendations can be obtained from the responsible agency named in the response.

Recommendation 1

The Department respond to notifications from the Department of Education and Training with the following information:

- A. that the notification has been received
- B. whether the notification has been assessed as a child concern report or child protection notification
- C. the name of the team leader who has been assigned to the investigation
- D. the direct contact details of that team leader.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agencies: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (lead) supported by the Department of Education and Training.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs (lead) and the Minister for Education and the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games responded:

Recommendations 1A and 1B are already covered by the regional intake service guidelines, which details that Core Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) members are advised within five days of the outcome of their referral to the regional intake service, and other professional notifiers (government and non-government) are provided this information upon request. For the Department of Education and Training, the advice is provided directly to school principals.

In relation to recommendation 1C and 1D, the *Child safety practice manual* was revised in January 2015 to include the requirement that on advising Core SCAN members (including Department of Education and Training school principals) of the outcome of their referral to regional intake service, the officer is also to provide the name and phone number of the relevant team leader from the child safety service centre responsible for the investigation and assessment.

The *Child safety practice manual* is the core source of guidance for child safety staff regarding operational procedures and is available online for staff to access.

Recommendation 2

The department considers updating its practice manual to mandate the practice that when a child concern report is recorded at a Regional Intake Service and relates to a notification which has been closed for less than 30 days to email the information to the appropriate child safety officer.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs responded:

A decision was made that the team leader who approved the investigation and assessment regarding the previous notification was the most appropriate child safety officer to be provided with this information. Given this, updates were made to the *Child safety practice manual* in January 2015 detailing the following:

When a matter is assessed as a child concern report and it relates to a subject child who is also the subject child in a notification where the investigation and assessment event has been closed for less than 30 days and an ongoing intervention has not been opened, prior to approval, the regional intake service team leader is to advise the team leader responsible for approving that investigation and assessment (note: if that if this officer is on leave, contact the team leader currently responsible for investigations and assessments at the relevant child safety service centre).

As the senior officer with most recent and thorough knowledge of the child's circumstances, the team leader who approved the last investigation and assessment will consider the new information in light of the recent contact with the family and the completed investigation and assessment, giving consideration to cumulative harm.

If the matter is complex, contentious or borderline, then either team leader can consult with their senior practitioner. The regional intake service team leader is the officer responsible for approving the intake response.

The *Child safety practice manual* is the core source of guidance for child safety staff regarding operational procedures and is available online for staff to access.

Recommendation 4

The department includes in its service agreements with intensive family support services the requirement that case closures on the basis of non-engagement are notified to the referrer.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs responded:

Intensive family support services work with vulnerable families who have complex needs to ensure they receive the necessary support before Child Safety intervenes. The Queensland Government is investing in both intensive family support services and community-based intake and referral services, now known as Family and Child Connect services, to implement the recommendations of

the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry. Family and Child Connect are being established to assist families to access support services without the unnecessary involvement of Child Safety. By mid-2016, Family and Child Connect will provide statewide coverage and may refer families to a family support service, if families are presenting with multiple and/or complex needs.

Both Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services are informed by program descriptions, service model and guidelines that detail clear procedures to ensure Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services staff are aware of their obligation to recontact Child Safety when closing a case on the basis of non-engagement. In regards to feedback to all referrers, the program description also explains that Family and Child Connect services can advise referrers:

- if contact with the family did not occur and the referral was closed
- whether the family did, or did not, engage with Family and Child Connect services
- whether the family consented to Family and Child Connect services providing information to the referrer, such as feedback on the outcome of the referral; note: This can only occur if the family did engage and the referrer has previously provided consent to Family and Child Connect services for the referrer's identity to be disclosed to the family.

Stage one of Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services were advised of these requirements during their inductions, which occurred in January 2015. Services for stages two and three will be similarly briefed during induction as they rollout in mid-2015 and early 2016 respectively.

Training delivered to stage one Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services from the end of May 2015, which included a module regarding first contact with families. The curriculum includes the requirement that the referrer is notified of case closures on the basis of non-engagement. This module is scheduled to be delivered to stage two services in August 2015.

Variations to the service agreements for other types of intensive family support services were made in late 2014 requiring a notification to Child Safety at case closure if families have not engaged. These changes were replicated in the service agreements for new Family and Child Connect and intensive family support services. Specifically, the wording included in the service agreements was:

Where families referred by Child Safety Services (regional intake service and child safety service centre) do not engage with the service, the service must advise Child Safety Services that the family did not engage. This information will form part of the child protection history for the family and ensure that any further action from Child Safety Services will consider the family's engagement in secondary support services.

This amendment has been supported by the development of a form that services can use to advise departmental officers of a family's non-engagement.

This form was provided to regional contract managers in March 2015 for distribution to funded services.

Recommendation 5

That the department notify every party to a current service agreement which utilizes the Community Sector Information System (CSIS) that:

- E. the department does not have access to personal client information or identified information on CSIS
- F. information entered into CSIS by service providers is not accessible by the department
- G. the department is only able to view referral information for families referred by Child Safety Services.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs responded:

The Community Sector Information System (CSIS) manual for non-government organisations explicitly states that departmental staff cannot access client records and information captured in CSIS.

To highlight this, in March 2015 a communique was provided, via the regional contract managers, to services under the referral for active intervention, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family support, fostering families and intensive family support programs to remind them of the limitations of CSIS. Specifically, the advice was:

that officers of the department, including Child Safety Officers, cannot view client information recorded on CSIS. The only information available to a child safety officer is the status of a case they have referred through CSIS. That status could be 'case assignment', 'assessment', 'exiting' or 'closed'. There is **no** other information able to be viewed by Child Safety.

Recommendation 6

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services engages at the earliest possible opportunity with Centrelink, the Department of Education and Training, Queensland Police Service, Queensland Health and representatives from the non-state school sector, to consider the feasibility of an information sharing system to allow agencies that have responsibilities relating to the safety, welfare or well-being of children to have access to customer information collated by Centrelink. In particular the name, address and telephone details for school aged children, their nominated carers and school-aged siblings. This consultation process should also consider, and take note of, those matters already recommended and accepted by the Queensland Government as a result of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (lead) supported by the Department of Education and Training.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs (lead) and the Minister for Education and the Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games responded:

Between August and December 2014, the Executive Director, Child and Family Services, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services led a number of discussions involving senior representatives from the Commonwealth departments of Social Services and Human Services, and Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, Queensland Police Service and Queensland Health.

Outcomes of these discussions:

- It was agreed that the existing bilateral protocol between the Department of Social Services and the Department of Human Services and state and territory child protection authorities that guides the release of personal information by the Department of Human Services in specific child protection circumstances that was reviewed in 2011 and remains relevant and appropriate to guide the release of personal information for child protection purposes and should remain in place without amendment for these purposes.
- Queensland Health representatives indicated that given the nature of confidential health information, they did not require additional arrangements to be put in place for the sharing of personal information with Commonwealth Government agencies without the consent of the individual about whom the information relates.
- Queensland Police Services and the Public Safety Business Agency representatives indicated they have existing appropriate information sharing arrangements in place to enable the release of personal information in particular circumstances.
- Department of Education and Training representatives indicated they would be interested in considering expanded information sharing arrangements with relevant Commonwealth Government agencies in particular cases where known children are not re-enrolled or enrolled in school in Queensland. They also indicated they would consider the outcomes of current trials in similar circumstances in the Northern Territory and South Australia.

The Department of Social Services representatives indicated they would liaise with the relevant Northern Territory and South Australian departments and provide contact details to the Department of Education and Training so representatives could follow up on outcomes of the trials.

A further meeting was held between representatives from the Department of Human Services and Queensland Government departmental representatives on 19 December 2014. The focus of the discussion was about looking for opportunities for the sharing of aggregate, de-identified data between the Department of Human Services and State and Territory agencies. It was noted there are a number of confidentiality and privacy issues still to be worked through. The Department of Education and Training committed to further discussions on this matter.

Recommendation 7

I further recommend that the department consider launching a public awareness campaign, particularly in Far North Queensland, promoting the fact that child protection is the responsibility of every member of our community and the role of the department in supporting families rather than removing children from those families.

Response and action: the recommendation is implemented.

Responsible agency: Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

On 22 June 2015 the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs responded:

The Queensland Child and Family Commission community education video 'Talking families' was launched in Cairns on 3 November 2014. Phase one of the social marketing campaign focused on community education encouraging community members to offer support to families under stress and encouraging families to seek and accept such help. Phase two will focus on targeting professionals to highlight the importance of early intervention with families and the new Family and Child Connect services. This campaign is a recommendation of the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry and was accepted by the Queensland Government. Its ongoing implementation and evaluation will be monitored through the Commission of Inquiry governance mechanisms.

Far North Queensland local initiatives:

- Far North Queensland Region led a number of community engagement activities across the region during Child Protection week 2014, commencing with a stall at Carnival on Collins in Cairns on 7 September 2014 highlighting the theme of child protection as everyone business.
- An art project (individual pieces) in Atherton displaying art painted by children and young people in the child protection system.
- An art project in Innisfail, painting of a mural – highlighting individual paintings of children's journey through the child protection system, including public launch of books, t-shirts and CD depicting the children's journeys. Several newspaper articles highlighted this project.
- Foster care agencies strongly promoted child protection activities throughout 2014, cumulating in an art competition in Cairns based schools. A banner highlighting all the art work was presented to Child Safety Services to be used in all future child protection promotional activities on 12 September 2014.
- Commencing in 2013–2014, Far North Queensland has been building capacity with partners through a Community of Practice model. This promotes shared support and messaging and allows for mentoring of staff to empower partners to work with families from an evidence-base practice model.
- Two workshops by Australian Childhood Trauma Group (Gregory Nicolau) for workers in the child protection sector were held in 2014.
- The Regional Child and Family committee since inception has been working with human service representatives and local government representatives to promote child protection messages.
- An regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice Leader was appointed in early 2015 and will take a lead discussions with Indigenous communities and agencies regarding responsibilities for supporting families at risk, assisting them to access support and where they can report child protection concerns.
- The Region is in consultation with Cairns City Council to incorporate Child protection is everybody's business in new playground /social infrastructure and development.

Actively promoting message in Far North Queensland community hubs/suburbs in partnership with Safer Streets Taskforce and Community Healing Project (initiative following eight child deaths in Cairns suburb).