



Family
Inclusion
Network
SEQ

AN ACTIVITY OF



MICAH PROJECTS

Shared Strength

Parents taking their
place at the table.

2007/08
First National FIN Roundtable in Brisbane.

2008
Family Inclusion Network South East Queensland (FIN,SEQ) and FIN Townsville (FIN,Tsv) established.

2008-2011
FIN,SEQ report "How do we engage with parents as partners?"

2013
Carmody Inquiry – 121 recommendations including "...parents should receive the support and guidance they need to keep their children safe."

2018
Qld Minister for Child Safety wants to hear from parents.

Human Rights Act 2019 passed in Queensland.

2007

More than Ten Years of Advocacy...

While the Minister’s announcement was a ‘first’, Family Inclusion Networks (FIN) are not new in Queensland or in Australia. Advocacy in Queensland alone, has been tireless for over ten years.



2015

FIN,SEQ attains 5 year government funding to support parents having a say (as per Carmody recommendations).

Departmental framework introduced "Strengthening families: Protecting children."

2019

2019
FIN,SEQ and FIN,Tsv – first meeting between parents and a child protection Minister (Hon. Di Farmer MP).



I want to hear from parents...

– Minister for Child Safety, Queensland.

On 1 June 2018, the Honourable Di Farmer MP, Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women, and Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence made an Australian-first announcement...

"We are committed to working with parents in developing the policies for this Department... to develop a formal committee for parents... and we can make sure that we are reflecting your views... to support you in the work that you do." – Hon. Di Farmer MP.

Micah Projects is very proud that we have reached a new milestone in advocating and supporting the work of the Family Inclusion Network. It has been 15 years since we first formed the FIN,SEQ.

FIN strongly recommended that, from the outset, parents must lead the development of the model, mechanism or committee created.

"We wanted to avoid the risk of a tokenistic 'pop up parent' consultation around an already prepared solution." – Susie Edwards, Coordinator, FIN,SEQ

Opposite: Susie Edwards (FIN,SEQ) and Doctor Rosamund (Ros) Thorpe (FIN,Tsv) "While we have a similar name, we're two separate organisations. Mind you, we've walked this path together for over 10 years."

Cover of the 'Carmody Inquiry' report 2013.

Bney shares her experience with the Global Day of Parents' audience of 200 people – Kangaroo Point, 4 June 2019.



An Australian-first announcement from the Hon. Di Farmer MP.

1 June – October 2018

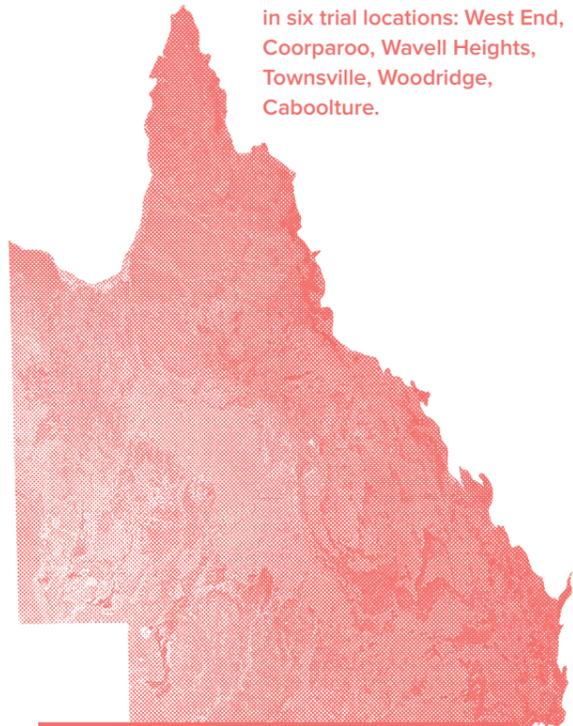
The Process

To the starting line and beyond!

Minister's announcement, planning and recruiting

Follow 'soft announcement' by Minister (1 June) with Family Inclusion Network and local departmental planning, and parent outreach and recruitment.

Parent Forums were held in six trial locations: West End, Coorparoo, Wavell Heights, Townsville, Woodridge, Caboolture.



PARENT LED PROCESS

From November 2018, FIN sought to empower parents to share their experiences of the Queensland child protection system, to contribute ideas and solutions, and to help create an ongoing mechanism for hearing and heeding the collective voices of the parents.

Over four months, FIN met with or spoke with **42 interested parents** either face-to-face at small 'parent forums', or via telephone interviews.

November–December 2018

Conduct 3 parent forums (Brisbane)

Local recruitment of 15–30 interested (not 'representative') parents for a series of parent engagement forums (Brisbane, then state-wide).

Parents needs met to attend (child-minding, transport, access).

February–March 2019

Conduct 5–6 parent forums (more regions)

Target 20-50 additional parents from rest of Queensland (46 offices/5 regions)

Questions for forum:

1. What is most pressing feedback from parents?
2. How might we co-design a permanent mechanism for parent engagement?

WHAT DID WE ASK?

The first question explored was...

“Why was it important for you to come today?”

Then two discovery questions were unpacked...

“How might we design a permanent mechanism for parent engagement in Queensland’s child safety system?”

In this part of the conversation the focus was on the Minister’s desire to hear from parents: and ensuring parents had a say in the development of the type of model or mechanism or committee that was created. Many national and international studies emphasised that the method for hearing parents’ voices was just as significant as the subject matter raised by the parents (ie. ‘process’ and ‘content’ are both important).

“What is the most important feedback about the system that you would like to give?”

WHAT DID PARENTS SAY?

These are excerpts from over 400 comments available at finseq.org.au



“I’m here so that I can make a difference.”

“This is so important, I’ve given up a day’s work to be here ... \$300... maybe even lost a job.... because we feel so strongly about this.”

“I’ve thought long and hard about what needed to be said today...”

“As a parent you want what’s best for your kids.”

“I think it’s truly... truly a good idea! We really need to be listened to. I’d be jumping to get at the table!”

“Get groups of parents together in different areas, and then they feed their ideas into a state-wide group of family members and they then can talk to Local and Federal MP’s.”

“Something that stays current: what happened to me, won’t be what happens to other parents in a year or two.”

“An agenda that is manageable - slowly nibble away at change – just 2 things on the action plan – then ask for regular feedback at next meeting”

“Needs to be permanent.”

“Once a year? 20-30 people?”

“Need to know that it’s not going to bite you.”

Some Issues

“So much judgement, expect to be a perfect parent... it is so much pressure”

“When you see the Affidavit!... WHAT?!?!? None of this happened!”

“I’m very very careful. I’m so careful – I make sure when I go to the Doctor to get a prescription, that I’m not there even one day too early.”

“Little issues. One slip: one missed court appearance, one relapse... there’s no room for any slip ups.”

“Everything gets interpreted and changed... it should be written verbatim [to prevent misinterpretation].”

“I’m always wary; always under watch.”

“I don’t think there are enough staff and they’re definitely over-worked. There needs to be people to facilitate. To support.”

“Some of us have seen the system over a long time: we can recognise policy and legislation has changed to be more effective. But it’s still not taking an empathetic approach to various situations which are often out of parents control, eg. both parents are punished for breaches of DVO; loss of housing or loss of income. A humanistic approach needs to be taken rather than the bureaucracy and silos of government or legal systems.”

Some Solutions

“Have an easy to understand book for parents on the processes of child safety and family court.”

“We could talk together... people who’ve been affected by the same thing. I can give some guidance and I empower them to stand up with me. We’ll do this together.”

“Need an independent worker – at each meeting.”

“What helps parents? I tell them my story: you can do what I did. I’m there for you: from the beginning to the end. If you’ve fallen down – then reach out. I encourage them: step back up; you CAN do this.”

Right: "From little things, big things grow" – words (and succulents) of thanks and inspiration for parents.

Opposite: Parents (and pets!) have cuppas, shed tears, and have a laugh or two... as they meet, build trust, and share unique expertise in improving the system.



11 Parents

...carried forward the words, ideas and goodwill from the other parent contributors.

To follow through on her vision, the Minister the Hon. Di Farmer, MP arranged to meet with some parents on the United Nations Global Day of Parents, Saturday 1 June 2019.

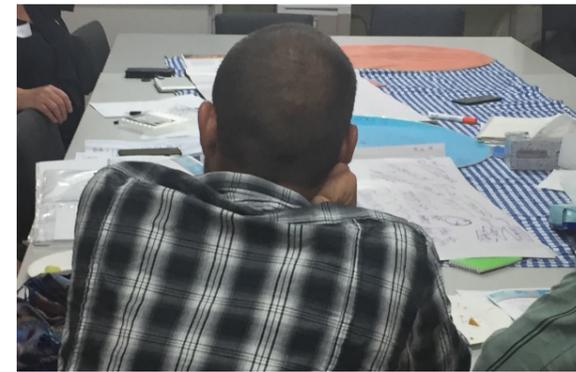
Eleven parents—a cross-section of parents with a range of experiences across the system, from a range of districts — prepared themselves for this meeting in Brisbane.

On 31 May 2019, in preparing themselves for their meeting with the Minister, the parents focused on three goals:

- » Summarise the key issues
- » Suggest a small number of solutions
- » Propose a model for the embedded, ongoing statewide parent advisory committee.

KEY ISSUES

1. Respect and relationships
2. Loss of identity / role as a parent
3. Support
4. Information about me
5. Information about my child
6. Timeframes
7. System really confusing
8. Legal support & resources



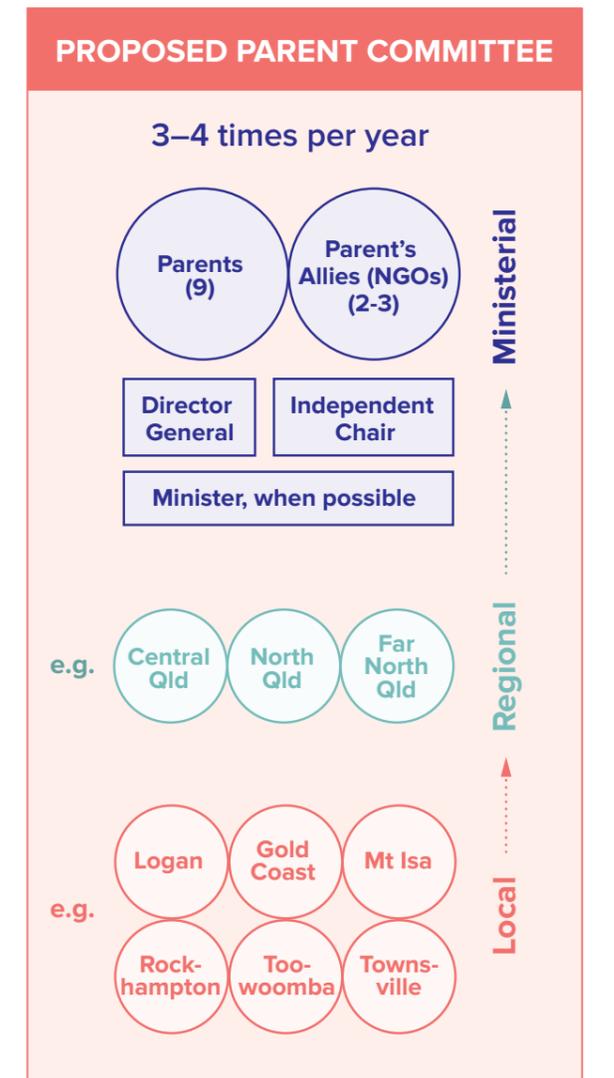
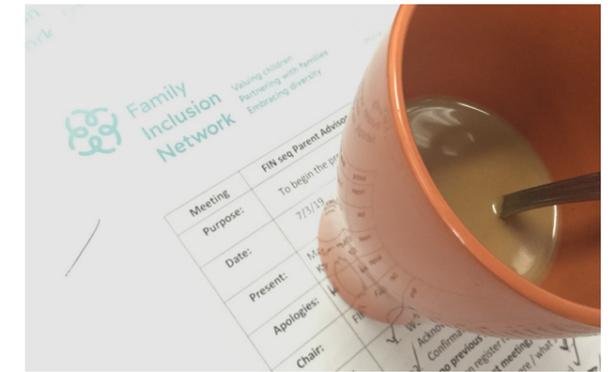
SOLUTIONS

The "given"

1. An embedded, on-going statewide parent advisory committee

and also...

2. Mandatory legal representation
3. Support ('early intervention') that addresses causes – housing, health, Domestic Violence
4. Intensive trauma-informed training for workers.
5. Paid parent advocates (per David Tobis' three-worker NYC model)



April – 31 May 2019

Liaison and preparation for parent-led ministerial meeting

Parents finalise the issues and solutions to be presented to the Minister. Parents feel skilled, 'on-message' and confident.

Proposed Parent Committee Model by parents, 2018–19



Parents meet with the Hon. Di Farmer MP, Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence – Hawthorne, 1 June 2019.



THE STARTING LINE

On Saturday 1 June 2019, parents held their first ever meeting with the Minister. This first meeting was described as ‘the starting line’.

“...it was a time for sharing, connecting, tears and working out what they wanted to share with the Minister. Everyone was ‘on task’—ready with solutions ... It was especially touching to see everyone supporting one another, the vulnerability of sharing such tender feelings was big, but the courage was bigger!”

– Susie Edwards, Coordinator, FIN,SEQ

“The parents spoke most articulately and the Minister was moved and empathetic. You are in a good position. I am hopeful that you have a very real opportunity to collaborate. In New York City there was far more adversity, but I know you have worked very hard for many years to get to this place. Remember—change takes longer than we want; longer than we need it to. There is no quick fix.”

– David Tobis, Ph.D, USA-based sociologist, author and change-maker.

“A warm thank you to the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents who shared their pain, experiences, strength, understanding and acceptance with their powerful energy of determination and drive toward justice...”

For the Minister to want to listen to a selection of parents from FIN as a sounding-board to improve the current child safety services, I think this opportunity was epic... I sincerely appreciated the opportunity to be heard, understood and take part in these overdue changes which need to be made within Child Safety Queensland. I felt this meeting was a successful beginning to having children’s voices and parents’ voices heard which will improve the child protection issues Queensland is currently dealing with.”

– “J”, one of the group of parents who met with the Minister, for over three hours.

1 June 2019

Global Day of Parents – first Ministerial parent engagement forum

Minister joins parents from across the state in the first child protection parent forum to discuss the ongoing mechanism for engagement.

Aim: Engagement to be embedded, with at least four opportunities per year for dialogue with the Minister and the Department.

Ready. Set. Go!

Awareness raising, inspiration, planning.



Clockwise:

Dee, FIN member for over 10 years, registering participants at the Global Day of Parents Forum – Kangaroo Point, 4 June 2019.

International guest speaker David Tobis with Micah CEO Karyn Walsh: “In New York City in the 1990s, over 50,000 children were in foster care. Today, this figure is less than 9,000.”

Susie, and Bney loving hearing Aunty Cephia speak her mind as part of the panel.

4 June 2019 (morning)

Awareness raising and inspiration!

Open forum with guest speaker David Tobis and parents, PeakCare, QATSICPP, HumanRights4Qld and FIN (the “What and the Why”).

4 June 2019 (afternoon)

Next steps/action planning

Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women workshop with David Tobis.

How did parents’ first meeting with the Minister go? What actions? How might we take the next steps locally? Who will do it? When?



Thanks

To all the parents who have come forward to speak with us, we say a heart-felt thank you. You have generously given your time, you have shared your wisdom and shown us how you want to change the system by making your voices heard.

We admire your strength, your resilience and your honesty.

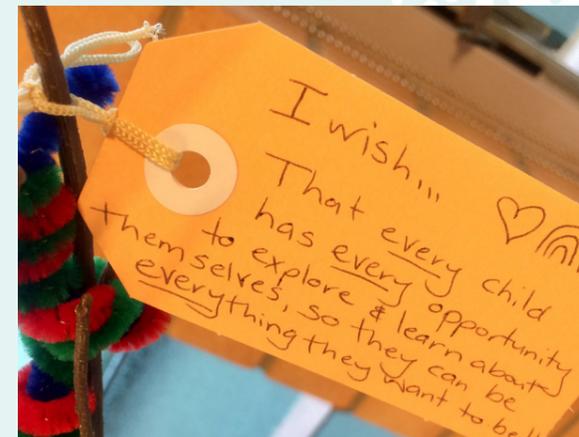
Thank you.

Acknowledgements:

- » **The Hon. Dianne (Di) Farmer MP**, Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. Thank you for opening the dialogue.
- » **Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women**. Particularly Director-General Michael Hogan, and Executive Director, Child and Family Practice, Kylie Phipps. Thank you for encouraging this parent-led project.
- » **David Tobis**, Maestral International. It has been a privilege to have your experience and guidance.

Left: Jessica Cocks, 2016 Churchill Fellow, and co-founder of Family Inclusion Strategies in the Hunter (FISH) speaks in Brisbane about her 2018 Churchill Report: "If a community values its children, it should cherish their parents. Family inclusion initiatives in child welfare". Photography Craig Holmes.

Right: FIN members Kirsti and Maddie edify the room at Global Day of Parents Day – Kangaroo Point, 1 June 2018.



WHAT NEXT?

Join the Family Inclusion Network as it continues to bring together government, parents and extended family members to work collaboratively on policies and issues that affect families.

- » finseq.org.au
- » facebook.com/finseq
- » 07 3013 6030 or info@finseq.org.au
- » Subscribe to receive parents' voices in our eNews 'Equal Chance'

Above: (Left to right) FIN's Aunty Cephia, Bney and Susie, join David Tobis, Alf Davis (QATSICPP), Amie McVeigh (McVeigh Law), Lindsay Wegener (PeakCare), Jenny (FIN,SEQ), and Karyn Walsh (Micah Projects) – Kangaroo Point, 4 June 2019.

Below: Every parent has wishes for their children – Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) 2018.



**Family
Inclusion
Network
SEQ**

Valuing children
Partnering with families
Embracing diversity

AN ACTIVITY OF



MICAH PROJECTS

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