



Family  
Inclusion  
Network

# 2018/19 Parent Forums: Experiences of Queensland parents in the child protection system

This document remains DRAFT pending its finalisation with parents in June 2019.

Over the past six months, the Family Inclusion Network has met with interested parents in six preliminary forums – in West End, Coorparoo, Wavell Heights, Townsville, Woodridge, and Caboolture. We have also had telephone ‘interviews’ with parent members of FIN who were unable to get to a forum. These parents have generously and courageously shared their experiences of the Queensland Child Protection system. Ideas were shared about how the system can better reflect the needs of families and how the Minister responsible for Child Safety, can best hear the collective voices of the parents who are impacted by the system.

*This is a collation of their stories and feedback...*

## A SINCERE THANK YOU...

To all the parents who have come forward to speak to 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, resilience and your honesty... Thankyou...

## OUR PROCESS

**Principles – Parent Engagement Strategy** – commencing the Minister’s commitment to establishing a “parent advisory committee”.

### **“Traditional Committee” vs a more flexible approach - parent-lead outcome**

FIN has strongly recommended that parents be consulted from the outset on the type of model or mechanism that should be created to meet the Minister’s commitment to parent engagement – to avoid the risk of tokenistic ‘pop up parent’ consultation around a pre-formed solution. The Department has supported this approach. As such, more fluid terms like “Parent Café”, “Forums”, “Circles” or “Roundtables” have begun to be used rather than “Parent Advisory Committee”. FIN does not have a preference for language however, pending advice from parents, has begun using the term **“Parent Forums”**.

### **Two Discovery Questions for Parent Forums 2018-19**

PART 1 - “What is most pressing feedback from parents?”

PART 2 - “How might we Co-design a Permanent Mechanism for Parent Engagement in Qld’s Child Safety System?” (ie. explore the pros and cons of a committee, versus other processes and mechanisms; name it; imagery etc).

### **Principles for Parent Forums 2018-19**

FIN and the Department have agreed to the following engagement approach and principles. They are being revised as the project evolves.

1. FIN SEQ subscribe to the view that parent engagement, in fact any civic participation, is a key tenet of a democratic society and that people should have the opportunity to participate freely and fully in decisions that affect their lives. *“Civic participation is not the panacea for service difficulties. It is not always a high priority and it has the potential to inflict harm as well as do good.”* (Micah Projects’ Citizen Participation Kit 2014)
2. Sound participation strategies are iterative or developmental: active and ‘productive’ participation may not happen immediately but can increase overtime by taking a developmental approach. The *means* of participation are as important as the *ends*.
3. In regard to the DCSYW parent engagement process in particular, a process that is parent led is vital. Departmental and/or Ministerial Attendance - FIN strongly recommends that no departmental officers attend initial forums. The Dept has been understanding of this. The Minister might consider whether it would be possible and/or appropriate for her and/or the Director-General to attend forums. Ideally this would be low-key, and in the latter or second rounds of forum/s.
4. **Process**: Engagement is **peer-based, focused conversations in small groups**. The group sets the rules at the outset: **group rules** regarding confidentiality are particularly important. Group rules may be similar to “The ROPES”: Respect, risk + Open, ouch + Participation, Perspectives, pass + Experience, ears + Safe, sensitive. **Facilitators** are not the expert, everyone’s voice counts. Facilitators must state the purpose and the process. The **venue** is a safe space, informal and welcoming. The use of small tables or ‘kitchen tables’ to mimic a café to reflect meaningful conversations between trusted friends.

5. **Parents:** a range of perspectives is sought. Parents are not all expected to be literate: a **diversity of preferences, learning and communication styles** are valued. While these forums particularly seek views from parents with **current and/or recent child safety system experience**; parents from all walks of life may become effective members of FIN as it builds parent leadership networks.
6. **Range of other ways to have a say:** In addition to Parent Forums, morning teas and periodic consultations - FIN also be can be contacted via phone, email, text, website, facebook or in person.
7. **Confidentiality:** Parents views are treated confidentially and anonymously. Demographic information (such as district, and family role) is recorded but is only be disclosed if the data is large enough to ensure anonymity. Limits of confidentiality: if information indicates significant risk or harm, then facilitators are required to take appropriate action.
8. **Record of parent views:** Notes are written and drawn anonymously (unless a participant strongly wishes their name attributed). To emphasise the highly personal nature of the information, write-ups of the sessions acknowledge each participant with an image and single letter identifier. Voice recordings are also sought on occasion subject to additional permission.
9. **Feedback loop and continued momentum:** Parents will be given a draft of the session write-ups within two weeks. Parents can suggest changes including deletion of material (generally within a two week timeframe). Parents and the Dept will then be given the final write-ups and/or audios. These will form part of a developing and on-going communication and increasing engagement of parents.
10. **Assume good faith:** Any parent may express their views. The recording of views assumes good faith: it is the intention of all parties to contribute to the continual improvement of the system. *Views have not been, and will not be, corroborated with official/government/court records. They are not presented in an effort to establish the "truth"... rather to demonstrate the range of perceptions.* (Tobis, 2013)

[v6: revised 10/05/19]

## PART 1

### My experiences | why is it important to be here today?

#### When I first come into contact with the system...

"I've thought long and hard about what needed to be said today..."

"But my son's in huge need of therapy. It'll become the next generation. He's watching [his other parent] take drugs, drive unlicensed..."

"I felt the message was 'You're a sh\*\* parent: good luck'."

"If you've been in care, then your children will come into care. That's what it feels like."

"I'm not saying all parents are 'innocent'. There are parents I'm worried about..."

"The words are so judgemental and one-sided. My 9-year old was helping attend to the 13mth old: that was a BAD thing in their report. "Parentified" it said. Would that judgement be made in other families?"

"I had six children in the care of the Dept: *but I placed them* – I said, 'This is where they're going'. There were allegations, charges.... All these lies... but I beat them in the Criminal Court. But when you're found guilty with Child Safety it's all still written there. That was terrible..... I'd never wish anyone to go through that. Depression soaked in.... everything.... I struggled for the first couple of years. I nearly lost 'my voice'."

"Parents still have *rights*."

"When your child is taken, you have no idea what just happened. I didn't even know it was 'a thing'. Then what? Where is the written down information for when you are in a space to process what just happened. Like in the middle of the night, I was googling.... I had no idea where to go, what to do..."

"I've got both sides: I'm a dad and I was taken... stolen as a child."

"They [the parents] might have stuffed up a bit... but there was NO abuse or neglect."

"We've been fighting for 5 years. We have special needs children. One was in hospital so I tried to get in to see them. I tried to do the right thing: I rang Child Safety After Hours to ask for permission to see him in hospital. I was 3 ½ hours on hold. The hospital staff wanted me to see [the child] they said yes and would support me. The Dept said no."

"I nearly died [of serious condition] after the birth of my baby. But while this was going on, the father took the children while I was in hospital. I was so sick, I couldn't feed the baby, bub lost a lot of weight. But I fought the whole way. They didn't like that."

"Would have been good to have a kit or a piece of paper to tell you what happened.... Like a flyer that said 'Feel free to contact QCAT or ....'."

"There could be a "Checklist" – X Should be happening – tick, Y should be happening – tick."

"I wish I'd had been given a resource like the South-West Legal Service booklet."

"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 had a dream to make a bag (like a 'Bounty Bag')..... and I decided to make my dream into reality... with a personal letter from me .... To say I've gone through this: here is what you need to do, here are some numbers to call, here is some printed material, some tissues, ...

[Talking about the South-West Legal Services book and other resources...] "Wouldn't it have been good to have had this 6 weeks ago!"

"I jumped through every hoop. I put myself in for support services, some before the Dept told me to. I did that all myself.

[Flipside: Sometimes people *want* the Dept to get involved & the Dept *doesn't* get involved] "They said 'there's nothing we can do: there are plenty of 'functioning drug addicts' out there. There's food. The house is clean.

I wanted the children to go to stay with my parent. The Dept said "No, they need to go to a foster family.

I got the children back after 9 weeks but only if supervised by [kinship carer]. This was the condition for years. This was so hard 'cause [the kin carer] worked, so we had to put the children into long day care because I couldn't have my own children 'unsupervised'.

"The hospital notified at 16 weeks: the dept came at 32 weeks. Why did they wait so long to speak to me? Then my baby was born four weeks early.

"I disclosed myself. I went to the Dept. My ex-partner had sexually abused my child, and others. There was a decade of domestic violence. Police weren't good. Dept said "You chose your safety over your child's". Then they told the scribe to scrub that out.

Went to Family Court... Children's Court.... Multiple adjournments... I got the DVO with all the conditions I was after. He had over 200 charges, ended up with 70.

The safety plan stated clearly that I shouldn't speak with or contact my ex-partner.

Then the Dept said "You need to maintain a relationship between the children and their father". I was made to arrange contact despite a No Contact Order. So he gets on the phone to the children, crying, controlling...

I said how hard this was to the Dept: and they said "What violence?" !! There had been ten years of violence. They said there was no record of it on the paperwork they had.

## *How it feels for me*

Dad: "They've taken the loooooove of my life.

"Control, power-over, manipulation.

"The damage is done. What happens when they're [the dept] wrong?

"This is your roots. No matter what the culture: this is people's roots we're talking about. And the Dept have plucked that plant, from the roots, away. There's no compassion whatsoever.



"[Paternal] grandparent had never seen bub. Twelve months old. They were coming from [town 3 hours away] for their own hospital visit, for one morning in Brisbane [grandparent is severely disabled after an acute infection]. Could they see bub while they were here? The Dept said 'No. Not comfortable with the baby going to the hospital.' ?!

"My 16 year old came at me with a knife... a knife! They tell a psychologist they're being abused. No-one checks their story with the parents. Yes, there were some hard times. As a 10 year old I guess that might have been scary. But it was all in context; all typical life experience. Then they get teenager 'lizard brain' – and they can say whatever they like. And now the response is "Kids don't lie". Since when?

"The family unit is not taken into account. As grandparents of the children taken... we feel so strongly... but we, as next of kin, we are invisible. The whole family is so important. As we know from all the news these days... so many children are bereft of a connection... they're split between multiple families and carers.

"They've ripped away her role as a mother: taken her motherhood. She wasn't doing too bad – under the circumstances: with [lots of] hyperactive children.

"What we are talking about is 'generational narcissism'! By that I mean... cruelty: tell me to kick this goal, so I kick it. Then they say 'No – kick THAT goal'.

Talked about shame. "Shame- Oh yeah" "Fear as well"

"Feel helpless: painted as evil.

"Families feel like they're alone.

"It's traumatic being assessed all the time.

"You do the best you can.

"Too scared to ask for help.

"That was the biggest challenge of my life, the worst thing that could happen to any parent, is to walk away from your little ones. But I got through it: got my babies home.

"The parent is **still there**.

"Many parents are just 'done'. They've had no-one support them: been through the wringer.... they can't speak out: they're just done.

"Constantly feel like a bad mum, always looking over my shoulder"

"I have no self-worth as a parent"

"Once they have custody of your children, they play puppets with your life.

"I'm an assertive person. But I still got judged a lot for my race and my age.

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

"Everything gets taken so far out of context it's mind boggling.

"I'm always wary; always under watch.

"I can't show an emotion – or it's taken as I'm unstable; and if I don't show emotion, then I'm unfeeling. I don't know which way to act 'cause I'll do whatever it takes.

"I'm worried in every conversation: every word..."

"It took sooooo long to get my confidence back as a parent: I was always looking over my shoulder, what was he wearing, what did he have in his lunchbox. Stuff no other parent would think twice about.

"If the public knew what was happening... the terrorising effect for these parents.

"I don't want what I say to get back to the Dept: how can I trust you?

"... in the Criminal System you can commit a CRIME and be redeemed... but in Child Safety you can lose *your child* – and no redemption.

"The Intimidation is not helpful.

"I'm grieving but they don't want to hear about it.

"You cant show emotions: or I'm 'elevated' emotionally.

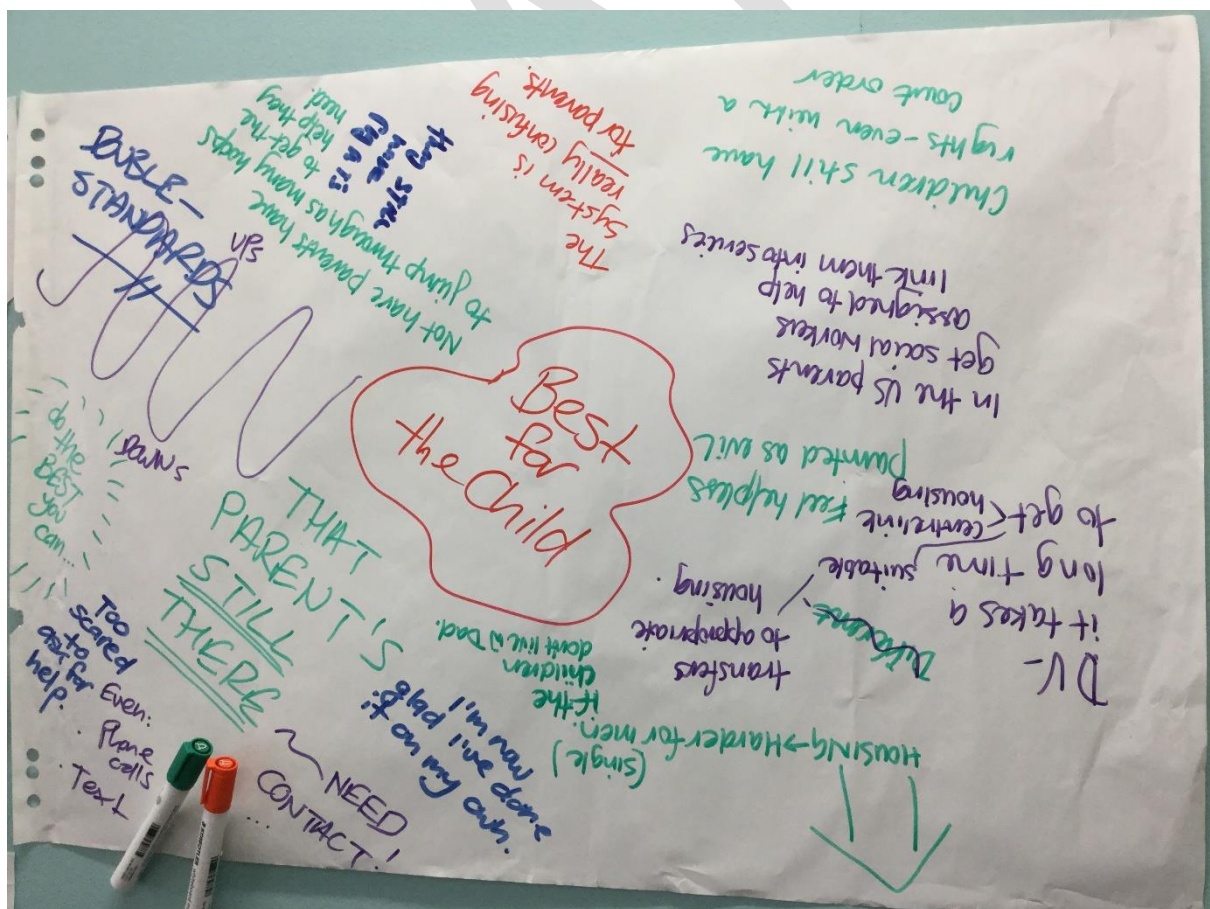
"All these things you learn. I've started to 'be like them'... really hard, no emotions. I'm on [medication] now to keep me calm. It's like you have to medicate to deal with this.

"I DID do the wrong thing: I was really angry – did all the wrong things, broke a DVO....

"I feel really happy that my son is now [majority] in my care... I'll keep fighting.

"A lot of parents become stronger.... If they don't go the other way! Make or break: they actually did break me in the beginning.... I went and sabotaged myself.... But now I'm stronger.

"People  
change..."



"It is an 'us' and 'them' thing ... but it can be what's needed. It was time to get that wake-up call.

"They made me step into my power

"It's like the cyclone, the storm you go through.... Then the calm.... But then it passes – and it's only me to clean up the mess.

"Maybe we're the ones! Maybe we're breaking that cycle, stopping our children from having the lives we had, or our mother had...

"I did call one a 'cold-hearted b\*\*\*\*' which I shouldn't have.

"My child got burnt accidentally – in the father's care at the time. Dad was "watching" the kids while I worked two jobs to support them. But somehow that was MY fault. So then I did this course, and climbed that mountain, and did everything they said.... and it still wasn't enough.

"At schools, the word gets around... they are in care.... With a carer.... They have to bear that stigma.

"I was taken – from when I was 3 until 9 ... then I wasn't prepared for life.

"Reminds me of the prison experiment [Stanford Prison Experiment]. Those with the power – they change.

"I admit I did f\*\*\* up with one of my babies, I was in a bad place, in a bad, violent relationship. But I have been 4 years clean and still my newborn child was taken away from me"

"The system that's been created.... it's established high structure. Renders you worthless. Nameless. Even go so far as to say to the children 'dont ask to talk to your dad, or you might be taken away.' I did get to the point of thinking about suicide. I've needed professional help to work with me, get through my grief. None of this needed to happen.

"Where are we at now? With the Royal Commission [into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse] and the Inquiries.... who can we trust? Children are just as likely to be harmed by the ones who are meant to help?! I'd like to see the stats, the ratio of harm from parents, versus harm from carers or other people.

"Rent is \$300, child support is \$250. I have \$90 a week to live on."

Discussion of finances – and housing – and its impacts on their lives and their ability to be able to parent their children including having them in their care.

"When you lose your kids you lose your parenting payment, your Go Card...

"Youth Allowance is \$250 per fortnight: how do I get to visits, meetings, be prepared to have my child back, keep my house, get back on track?!

[Conversely] "I made a fatal mistake: the Dept told me not to worry about notifying Centrelink. 'Cause it would only be for a little while. So I kept getting Parenting Payment. (And I got the Baby Bonus two days after my baby went into care...). It was only for 6 weeks – but I still ended up having a Centrelink debt of \$6,000. I'm very lucky though: I just ended up with a debt; I didn't lose my income.

"Transport is a massive cost: I moved but the office stays the same. Or the office moves. One example, I had to catch the bus from x to y for visits and meetings. [20kms to drive but 2 buses, and an hour-90mins each way on public transport].

[Federal] "The 14 year old gets \$220 independent living allowance: and the parent gets nothing. And then the Medicare refund gets made out to them. But I paid for the visit – and they get the refund.

"It's petrol backwards and forwards. We don't get reimbursed. I said I can't make it because we have moved and they replied well you should have thought of that before."



**"The System is  
really confusing..."**

"There's a 'new thing' – under a health scheme / QAIHCs – where they HAVE to listen to parents (not like DoCS). In DOCs we have no voice.

"Mental health wards for young people – "This is the 12<sup>th</sup> admission. As parents: we get the call out of the blue. Where are we? What the hell? You're standing there totally shell-shocked. All the families sitting around. Awful. No-one makes

a sound (so you hear the sounds of young people in distress). No-one makes eye-contact. The confusion and shame. We all sit silently. Interesting, I wonder... if it was a child's cancer ward, it would be just as awful but families would talk to each other. Look at each other. Be compassionate. Child Safety come and go – they won't talk to us either.

"Child Safety weren't the main dept. not the main issue: it was mental health. But they got pulled in. And the systems don't talk to each other.

"I won't have ANYTHING to do with Qld Health: everything I've ever done, if ever I've asked for help – it was dragged up and used against me.

"I had a homebirth and I didn't vaccinate. I feel like I was targeted. They stuffed up the paperwork twice, so I wouldn't sign that. That would have been fraud. I was penalized for that.

"I've got no rights to know about my children."

"The system is really confusing.

"There should be clear steps: DO this, DON'T do this.

"You need that 'care pack' that mother created: to tell you what happened, what to do, who to call....

"So hard to get other written information out of the Dept. I had to push and push for 3 months to get a letter in writing, that I needed, just to confirm what they'd been saying.

"I lost legal representation funding. They [Legal Aid] don't fund parents who go to court when they don't think they'll win.

"There is one lawyer I know, so busy now: who's great for family group meetings because speaks on behalf of the parents.

"The first thing the Dept said to me was: 'You need to get a lawyer'.

"Really? Wow! That's great!

"The solicitor process gave me anxiety.

"**Access to legal support** – or any support – is harder for lower-socio-economic families. The Armed Forces provides legal support for its families. Those who can afford legal help are fine.

"The judge was nice and reasonable: saw I'd taken the time I needed.

"Men's representation is always low. And it shouldn't be.

"I've rung pages of places: there are plenty of services! But they say 'You're a Dad: work it out for yourself. There's a lot of sexism.'"

"Hard to role model being a good Dad: the 'Men's lines' are just focused on 'getting back' at the woman.... How's that helping the children?

**"Asking for / getting help  
should not be seen as  
weakness."**

"Fathers are important: I'd rather have had a bad dad than no dad. You are missing that whole side of you.... It breaks you. And not having your family..... that's the difference between achieving and being broken. You need a family. A foster family cannot replace the 'whole tribe' that comes with family.

"Police responses need to be different. Parents damned for grabbing the child because they [the child] are taking drugs.

"Blue cards: we KNOW there are people who shouldn't be with children. But they only reject someone for a Blue Card once they've been CAUGHT.

*"'Children are safe when taken away'... that's one of the biggest myths of society.*

"[Children coming into care] Sometimes it *does* have to happen: like all these issues about Ice. We've got to get onto it! Right away. Get the family on side now! I've gone to the Family Law Court and got children placed with the grandmother: doesn't have to go through Child Safety. And it's done in a day. Straight to the grandmother, with no Child Safety orders in place. Just grandmother having Guardianship. Then the mother and father have to go to get the help they need. See there are ways.

"I'm still the Guardian, so I'm always involved. But when in kinship care, she'd go everywhere, to every doctor... to pin something on me. Back then I didn't even know, didn't have a say.

"Needs to be continuity so that the service and support doesn't end suddenly (eg. NGO pulls out after court).

"the Department demand that I have be here at certain times that are inconvenient to me, sometimes I don't get home until after 5pm and then the kids are tired and cranky"

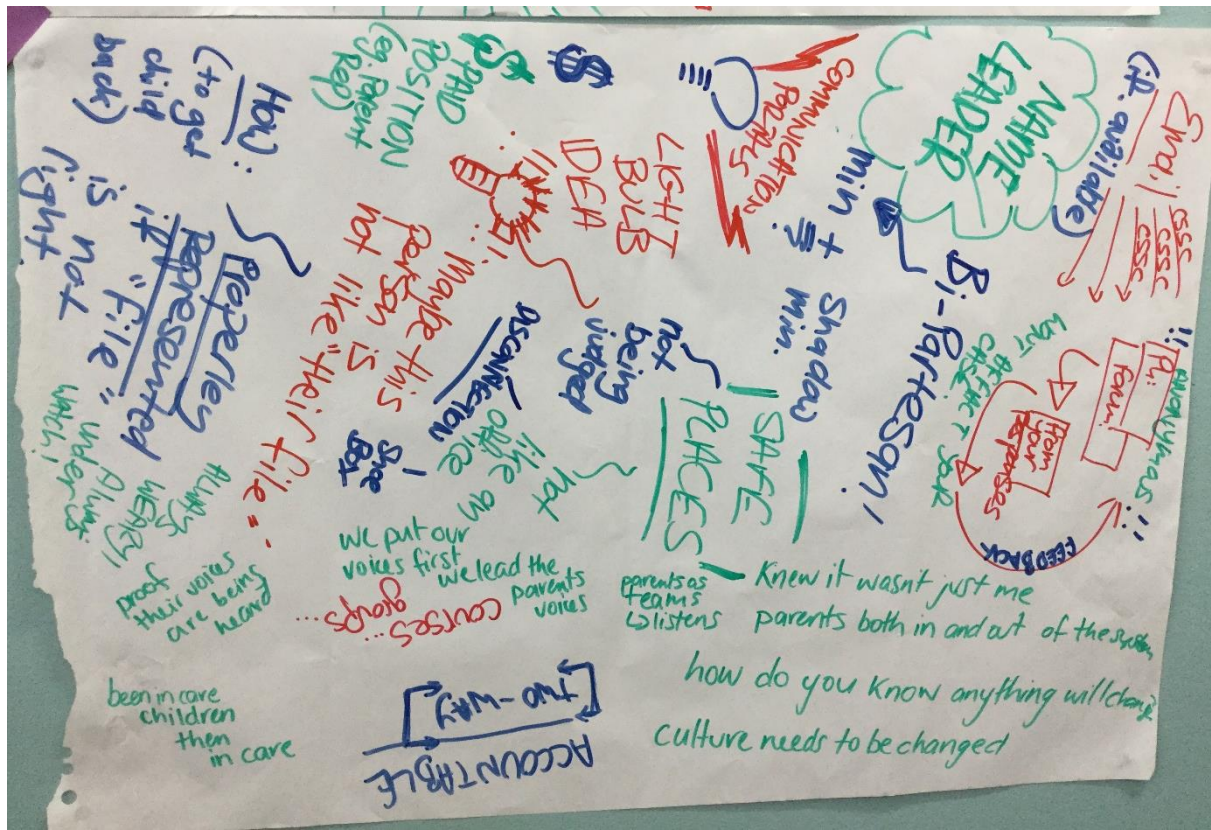
"they said I was not capable of looking after a baby, but they were using an assessment that was done ten years ago when my brain was still developing. Everything is based on the past and people can change"

"Parents need contact.

"I did all the courses.... They say: 'Just one more hurdle.'

"Little issues. One slip: one missed court appearance, one relapse... there's no room for any slip ups.

"Double standard to other families: I didn't have the house clean once! How does everyone else go with that? And the *carers* can smoke around the children.



Parents are saying they are happy to 'step up' and can see why some decisions are made however others decisions don't make any sense to them.

"I now record every conversation I have on my phone. (I always tell them I'm recording)

"? Do you have to?

"They call me paranoid. But it helps... 'cause they twist everything. It also helps me go back over what I've said when I'm calmer, what I sounded like...

"You become like a detective: less trusting.

"One minute it's fine: next it's a problem: it's the INCONSISTENCY.

"if it is not in the 'plan', I'm not allowed to do it – it's like I'm on parole – yeah – child safety parole. I got in trouble for getting driving lessons – not in the vocational plan"

"Team Leader wants my child to move schools. So it is cheaper in transport/ProCare. What about our wishes?

"taking so long to get kinship assessments and background checks done."

"I have to get background checks for all my friends, but my child's carer doesn't. Kids are more in danger with the carers then they are with me!"

"But doesn't that get used against you too: that you need support, that you cant do everything on your own, unassisted?

"No support. You don't meet the criteria.

"I put my hand up for rehab. I had no role model for that. We can do this.

"I know they're overworked: but if they didn't take so many children in the first place ....

"I've tried to seek help so many times but got turned away, cannot help you because of child safety- that's their policy."

"Conversations about double standards, legislation, family law court and family conflict, family court and DOCS involvement and different legislation to understand."

"The NSW permanency stuff really worries me."

"the system needs to be pulled down and rebuilt with families in mind"

"My situation is not like any of the other ones. Everyone who's read the reports, say it doesn't make any sense. I have a teenager... who lies... who's committed crimes in care. Didn't before they went into care. The Dept wants the two of us to "get counselling" but there are 5 of us in this family: I have to think of the other 2 children. If the Dept is looking after them: they need to look after them: with rules and boundaries like any parent: not give them everything they want."

"You can go to all the parenting courses – but you CANT stop your child trying drugs. Or having sex – to afford drugs."

"Where's the support when my child beats ME up? I cant get them to school: then they say "Be a harder parent".

"Teenagers who've been in the system... They're broken."

"When they're teenagers.... They/we start to think .... Start to become angry and rebellious.... They *don't want* their lives run by complete strangers."

Our 16 year old told Child Safety we were abusive, and moved in with a 33 year old. Once we were cleared... no-one was told that bit (not the school, or all the others who'd been told we were abusive). The confidentiality: now they're 18 and suicidal ... on life support for days... we weren't told."

"My [15/16 year old] is totally brainwashed... traumatised by all this. I get told we'll have 2 nights sleepover. Then that gets changed. Then they come for one night only. They need help to get over all this."

"As an 'Independent Minor' they can get their licence without their 100 hours. There doesn't have to be a responsible adult to supervise. It's backwards."

"Parents who were in care ourselves.... feel it deeply ... we know how the kids are feeling. But we have to be strong for our partners as well."

"The CSOs are only human. They don't always know better."

"They're not God. And there's no reverse on this stuff."

"I did get SOOOO angry. I said I was just about to reach across and.... But we ended up having a hug. They're doing a job."

"The more I fought, the harder they were on me."

"They can have lunch meetings... at the club... glasses of wine."

"If you love it so much, do it as a volunteer!"

"There are a lot of people who are in it for the right reasons."

"The system needs to be pulled down and rebuilt with families in mind..."

"I did the wrong stuff: I know. I give them [CSO] a cuddle. I'm sorry."

"Whenever they're late...nothing. But if you're late – by 5 minutes..... !!

"He likes being there [in care] 'cause he can do whatever he likes. He's going to go through life like that."

"Caregivers saying we are blackmailing to come to sleepovers, we are trying to encourage him. Trying to do the right thing for my boys, trying to do what any other parents are able to do."

"I haven't been able to work. I'm unemployable. Some days I can't get out of bed. Some days all my energy goes towards being a good mum."

"There's a reunification plan ... yes ... yes... At the end of 2 years you will be.... No ... we never said that."

"At the Contact visit... I wanted [partner/Dad] to bond with bub. Then Dept said 'You were a bit distant.' 'Yes, that was because I wanted Dad to have some time!'

"They are not doing their jobs properly, they are not listening."

"My issue was alcohol. But then – the carer's house is full of alcohol."

"We need changes, still... I know there's been a little bit but we need more changes ....the numbers of children coming into care have skyrocketed."

"Nothing's changed. We might be in a different place. But nothing's changed. But if you keep going and going and going and going.... You might get there. You've got to make the changes yourself. You can build the relationship on the ground. It took me years. I never stopped nagging."

"Dept has a new 'social assessment' – child has a whole day off school, we see a separate child psychologist, separate organisation. They see the child on their own, and then me. They look for further family/kinship who might be able to be involved. Aim is "what's in the best interest of the child"..... But actually, I don't know what that means really. Who's view of the best interest of the child? It seems really good. I got given a flyer... But I don't actually know what happens now: I just do as I'm told."

"My CSO is never there when I ring. But I have to answer when they ring... it's a double standard. It'll be an unknown number ringing.... And if I don't answer right away: I don't get another chance: I have things I need to do too. They know they have the power over me."

"There's a 'communication strategy' that is used to stop parents being able to get through to workers on the phone."

"I have an app on my phone so now I record all the conversations, and they've stop ringing now."

"We get these text messages from the Department, and they are always from different phone numbers. If I was still in a domestic violent relationship, this would really put me at risk"

"What's written down: there's no proof. It's not accountable."

"the Department don't seem to need evidence... but we do"

"I get ignored. I don't get my phone calls returned."

"Anything you say (to FIS or other services) gets subpoenaed and used against you."

"So much of what is written is untrue. And yet on the flip-side, they don't believe me: it took years for them to test, get evidence, to realise what I was saying was true: and that my child had been taken from me and put in a really unsafe situation."



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

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

"All these lies... when you're found guilty with Child Safety it's all still written there.

"They get material from everywhere in Qld government – Ambulance, Mental Health, Hospital. So I wont go – or I go, and I'm not honest so the information is not twisted and used against me.

One CSO contacted my GP! They cant do that. Thankfully – my doctor said no to giving them any information.

"It stays written down: if you had something written down in the system when you were a child...."

"They're not communicating: they're holding back things.

"Their intentions are never what they say they are.

"There's no communication, no support, no counselling.

"Can take me 2 weeks to get hold of the CSO. Then weeks to get a meeting.

"There's a reunification plan ... yes ... yes... At the end of 2 years you will be.... No ... we never said that."

"At the Contact visit... I wanted [partner/Dad] to bond with bub. Then Dept said 'You were a bit distant.' 'Yes, that was because I wanted Dad to have some time!'

"The notes they write: "Mum is very controlling".... Yep! I am if that means I'm not going to let her go to a party where there are drugs and alcohol!

"The Affidavit was this big [10cms thick]; the exhibits were three times that.

"? Have you ever made a complaint?

"Once. QCAT intervened to get more financial support for the things I had to do: like get to meetings.

"There are two types of people: those with children; and those who don't have children. Most of them [Dept/CSOs] don't have children.

"The CSOs are only human. They don't always know better.

"They're not God. And there's no reverse on this stuff.

"I did get SOOOO angry. I said I was just about to reach across and.... But we ended up having a hug. They're doing a job.

"The more I fought, the harder they were on me.

"They can have lunch meetings... at the club... glasses of wine.

"If you love it so much, do it as a volunteer!

"There are a lot of people who are in it for the right reasons."

"Whenever they're late...nothing. But if you're late – by 5 minutes..... !!

"I did the wrong stuff: I know. I give them [CSO] a cuddle. I'm sorry.

"They are not doing their jobs properly, they are not listening."

"They treat the Dad 110% differently to how they treat me. He wasn't really a Dad – he'd had no contact: it was a one-night stand. But he went to court: I didn't even know the case was being heard! He started dating a CSO! I had to fight for 1 ½ hours a week.... Up from once a fortnight.

"Carer said to my child: "BEHAVE yourself or I'll start treating you like every other foster child!"

"The carer won't work with me. My child is in school with holey shoes. Which is an awful. The carer says it's because they ride a scooter to school... which is good but the holey shoes. So I came up with an idea as the mother: 'Why don't they wear the holey shoes on the scooter and change into better shoes at school?' That wasn't an ok idea they said.

"He likes being there [in care] 'cause he can do whatever he likes. He's going to go through life like that."

"Caregivers saying we are blackmailing to come to sleepovers, we are trying to encourage him. Trying to do the right thing for my boys, trying to do what any other parents are able to do."

"Young woman in care... wanted to have the contraception rod removed. Should be able to choose. Sure there are other parts to sexual health, but she should be able to choose if she has the implant or not. But the Dept said "No".

"Dept knocked back my family for kinship care.

"I hardly ever know [my child's] medical situation... It took them four days to tell me she was in hospital.

"The Dept are too focused on my mental health, you get discriminated against, pigeon-holed.

"My mental health issues flare up when I see the dept.... when they took my kids.

"Mental health is not what the Dept is qualified in: they're not psychiatrists. I had two reports to say I'd been stable for four years: four years. They think everyone with mental health issues is bad.

"I haven't been able to work. I'm unemployable. Some days I can't get out of bed. Some days all my energy goes towards being a good mum."

"They said I was 'heightened' (it was taking months: yes, I do get impatient after a while). That word means something specific in mental health. Are they qualified? Does everyone know what the terms means when they write them down?

"I went higher... to the DG. They're paying me back for that.

"They don't have awareness of their power eg. the first affidavit: that is overwhelming.

"I've got a great relationship now with [local] office – I get straight through to the Manager. That's a good thing: I get the answers straight away. Done and dusted. But that's taken years. I've got really good communication with all the people – police, health, child safety...

"But all that said, the Dept being involved in my life has been good... it forced me into CBT... there is a positive. It helped me break the pattern.

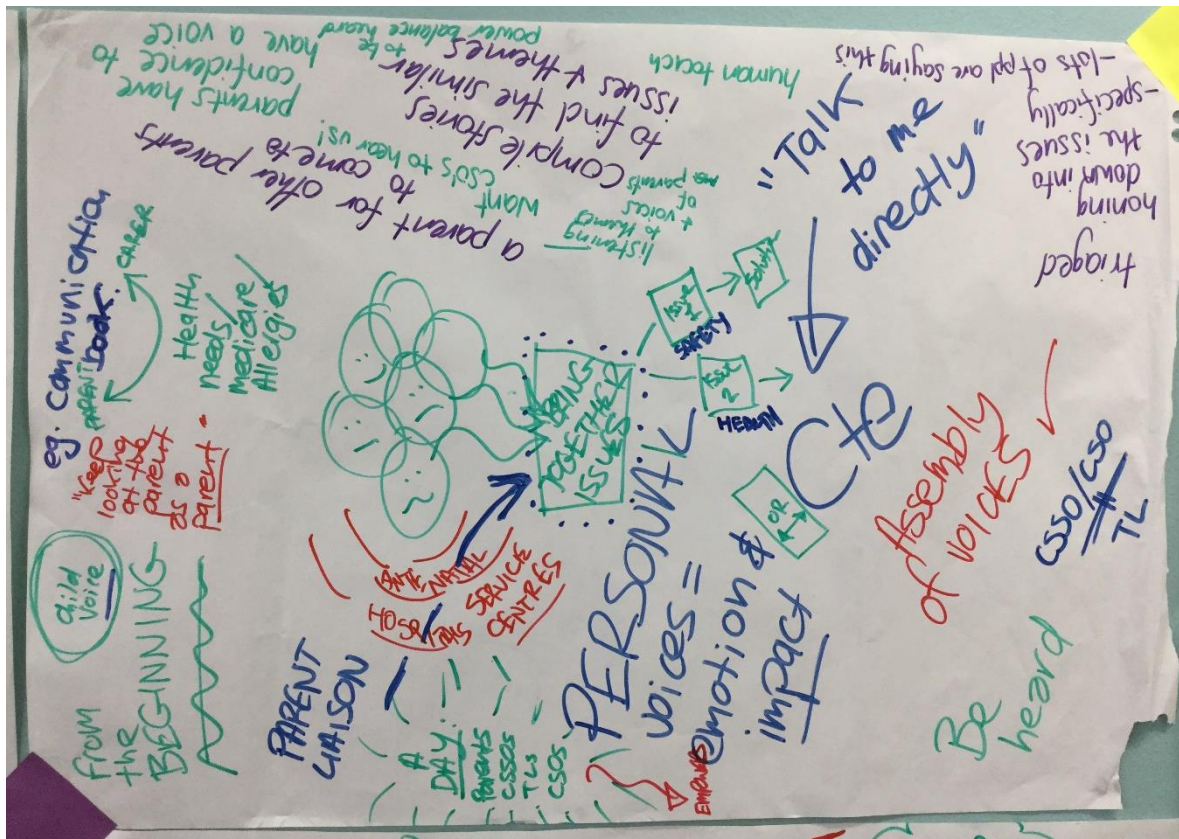
"They are not your friend: some CSOs are nice, or empathetic... but that is not their role. It is confusing.

"There are a lot of people in the wrong positions, you've got to get out and do the groundwork. They sit on a pedestal. Judgemental people; they don't even know these families. There's a lot to be done: to get the support families need. You need to get the parents involved: send the parents off to medical or rehab. Set that all up around you; and the parents together – do it in one big thing. When these parents don't get the support, they fall down ---- and a lot of them don't get back up again.

"When they're fresh out of uni, &/or don't have children... it doesn't work too well.

"If you're a Child Safety Officer you need to be detached. It's something about the role: I actually deal with it better when they're 'robots'. I prefer the calm and professional worker. They are not our therapists: they need to be clear about that. It takes a special sort of person: they take your child away: they can't be emotionally involved. They shouldn't be.

"You never know what is going on behind the scenes: I used to volunteer [at xyz] and they would be in tears behind the scenes.



9How they are viewed by their CSO's and the relationship that they have with them makes a difference to how they are treated.

"I had a great interaction, they helped me ensure that my ex-partner, now in custody due to DV, can not get access to my child. They were very helpful."

"One worker said to me 'It's my job - or - your children'

"They do help for a bit. Some of them. But then it's 'Oh! Sorry. We're out of time'.

"Worker undertakes to do things.. and then they are over-ruled (by their superiors).

"Some offices help me get practical things like a GoCard to get to meetings. Or a food voucher. Others don't.

"What if I'm not getting what I need from the office? I don't feel I can 'ask to speak to a manager' because the Team Leader puts me back to say "Have you raised this with the CSO?"

[About changing offices/new office/boundaries...] "What if my office is not working for me, can I seek advice at another office? I got asked "how would you feel about moving to X office?"

I said "No thanks. I'm settled here: I know people here."

They said, "Well, you need to move to this new office, so we're transferring you."

"I don't have a say in which worker or course or referral: I say 'I don't want to work with 'xyz'...They say 'too bad'.

"I understand there needs to be a Dept. But...

"They were calling me 'retarded'.... 'low IQ'... 'no evidence I could change a nappy'.

"Dept says – we don't care about you adults.

"Bullies... I never signed ANYTHING... 2 days... then 28 days... then 2yrs... now 18yrs!.

"I've given up asking about the first born: 'He'll be alright' they say. He's NOT alright! He's traumatised.

"If you go to the Dept for help that parent should receive the help they need (just like foster parents)

"Organisations help when the child is in your care, don't want anything to do with you when they aren't in your care. Just not willing to help"

"I hate it when they're not being transparent. You KNOW they're trying to do 'something' ... they're gathering evidence... but I don't know what they're up to or trying to get to.

"Christmas. It was all planned. For 7 months we were doing everything right. They said I'd have him. Then 'no'.

"I like to take afternoon tea for the visit, and maybe a little something for my son to play with. (A lot of time there are no toys.)

"The 'shoe box' visiting rooms!.

"Some have play rooms that are bigger. But you have to bring your own toys and lunch. And where is the money for that?

"Can't win: The children never see each other. Can't build a relationship. They say 'If you don't make it to Contact. They can't see each other. That's where they see each other. Well the time ticks away: one carer brings one child, then the other carer brings the other child... all after school... my time's ticking away: now it's 4:30pm and we were just getting started. How does this work? It just can't fit in the time!

"There are two types of people: those with children; and those who don't have children. Most of them [Dept/CSOs] don't have children.

"They [the Dept] cause DV with all the pressure and stuff that happens.

"But I was in a DV refuge: I had no money for food or for anything to take to my child on the contact visits. I had nothing to give to my child.

"What if the DV is a first-time incident? That happened to me: the police said, 'If we have to come out here again, we're bringing Child Safety and taking your child.

"When I was pregnant, that's when I saw a social worker at the hospital: told them all the dark things he was doing to me (never physically violent, but controlling and really awful stuff)... I didn't realise that meant they had to report me to DOCs. It would make people stay away from hospitals and support.

"My BlueCard was not approved because I'd exposed my child to domestic violence!! 'Mother blaming'

**"I wanted to let you know ... how betraaaaaayed I've felt. I was afraid for all our safety....** I went to the Dept for help... I gave the children to the Dept for their safety.... and they gave them to the father! Didn't matter what was going on there... they said that wasn't the Dept's issue.

"The term 'domestic discipline' is used – it's domestic violence!

"Visitation centres don't want to touch families with DV orders.

"The language – what does "in the best interest of the child" really mean? Or 'elevated'?

"So much on my file is lies.

"I can only talk to my friends and family... not the 'professionals'.

"That's good: For me, I can't even talk to my family: they think I'm using again if I say I'm having a hard time...

"That's like me: I only tell people just enough. I'm very very careful. I'm so careful – I make sure when I go to the Dr to get a prescription, that I'm not there even one day too early.

"That's such an unnecessary state of fear. Normal parents don't behave like that! [Hypervigilant]

"Everything you do, you worry about: raising your voice in the supermarket. Or at home.

"[laughs] Now I live in a higher socio-economic area: I hear way more yelling and screaming and swearing now than I *ever had*. The mothers at school... 'Let's go have a drink!' .... ?!? It's 8am!!!!

"Different cultures and upbringing – some families aren't sure what's acceptable in Australia.

"I'm not sure either when the neighbour's child cries non-stop... non-stop.

"Yet my neighbours get cross and slam the windows shut when we play in the yard, jumping and laughing on the trampoline, or kicking a ball.

"So much inconsistency. Seems that one family has one set of rules but they don't apply to others"

"So much inconsistency across different services. When I was in hospital having my baby, I wanted to breast feed, child safety was saying I was not allowed to, and the nurses were encouraging me to. I expressed milk for 2 weeks. They were trying to take away my rights as a parent"

"It's a POSITIVE that I've gone there: to seek help. But it can look the other way...

"If I was suicidal: I wouldn't tell the psychologist at the hospital/mental health emergency... They'd notify DOCs.





## What's needed?

**Drug & Alcohol** - "Why not respond to the real cause: eg. Drug or alcohol addiction.

Drug and alcohol need to be treated as a health issue.

"The CULTURE needs to change. How do you know anything will change?

**Funding, Services, outcomes** – "Funding should be based upon goals being met.

[Flipside: Sometimes people *want* the Dept to get involved & the Dept *doesn't* get involved]

"There ARE ways to support children: the dept wont get involved unless you're trying to kill the kids.

**More support staff** – "I don't think there are enough staff & they're definitely over-worked. There needs to be people to facilitate. To support.

"Select Family-Inclusion trained people, and they should use the new Framework. (See new grads going into the system – then you cant recognise them after 6-12 months)

"Get CSOs, workers, psychologists trained by parents. Before they come in and get influenced by the "old system and culture"

"Staff need to have children. I'm sorry – I say, 'Unless you have children, what would you know?'.

"Workers... sometimes are drawn to the job for the wrong reasons. Are passionate to help children after their own experience.... Fighting for children....

"Training: In WA they have three months training – they don't seem to have the 'blame culture'. Workers are not seen as the enemy.

**Training / Uni Curriculum / Culture** - "There needs to be more training in DV. The supervisor of my CSO said 'I didn't realise DV was such a big issue'.

"Need specific training in DV.

"Stop children being reunified with perpetrators of domestic violence when other parent is safe.

"Why is the implementation of the DV improvements taking so long? We had the report: but still nothing's changed.

"DV. It takes a long time to get suitable housing and Centrelink.

"Who do you talk to if you're unhappy?

" 'Royal Treatment' – eg. practical things like haircuts: once a month & Christmas.

"Keep looking at the parent as a *parent*.

"You have to be tactically assertive. Do your research. Keep your emotions out of it. (But many parents are too worn down for that...)

"I am afraid, I was afraid to seek help: because then it "will get back" and my in-laws or the Dept will take my child.

"Everyone has their ups and downs: but there are double standards once you get into the system. Your downs are emphasised.

"Children still have rights – even with a court order.

"Child's voice needed from the beginning.

**Foster carers** – "Some foster carers are keeping families connected. Special weekend get-togethers. Really special. (But the dept doesn't like them doing that.)

**Flexibility?** "Activities are coming up – like Monster Trucks and birthdays – I know it's not 'our week' – ok – but I won't EVER ask again.

**Medical** - "The foster carers don't know the medical information, they need to know." "What's the first thing that you should do when a child is in hospital. You should ring the parents."

"Housing. It's harder for men. Especially single men whose kids don't live with them.

"Transfers to appropriate housing takes so long. Too late.

Public housing for separated families – Dads cant have their children because the house is too small. Parents cant re-unite with children because the house is too small.

"A Communication Book: like at childcare. To exchange information from the Carer to the Parent (health needs, allergies, medicare)

**Parents workshops** - "I do my own little workshops. Out of my own pocket. I had 10 at the last one. We 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.

""A toll free number for parents to call would be good – they can listen to parents complaints"

**Information** - "The misinformation, then the paucity of information: it's so important to source good solid information about "How we can get help".

"Have an easy to understand book for parents on the processes of Child Safety and family court.

"Need a "How to get your Child back" resource.

**Investigations** - "Police Investigations are conducted: yet no-one seems to have been interviewed. Everyone needs to be interviewed and have their say.

Who's policing the police? Need accountability: like an ombudsman.

"Needs an independent investigation team – investigate concerns thoroughly first without bias.

Complaints on outcomes to be investigated independently.

**Placed with extended family** – The Indigenous Child Placement Principal says to place children with family or kin. Why is this only a principal for Indigenous children?

"Need legal representation or right of information appeal – if information on the file is not right. Ability to get it expunged.

"More support for families & Dads. Dads are particularly unsupported. Men don't want to see children hurt.

"Value fathers J <3.

"Rehabilitation units for families.

"Clear messaging and consistency.

"Wonder about what is in the university curriculum / qualifications: say it is "child centred" but not sure this is the case when the child can end up worse off.

"I sit with other families and parents: I sit with the services I have relationships with – make sure they do the referrals, then and there. Same day; while I'm sitting there. To housing, rehab, health, education...

"I've got three families I'm working with under orders, and when I help them and the children come home.... I don't stop at that ... I'm still in their face ... the support shouldn't stop.

"Asking parents what they need.

"Child care. Help with child care. Help from the dept to pay the child care.

"It would be good if there was a focus on us – as the caregiver – what our needs are. Otherwise it feels crippling.... When there's no support"

"What if there were less hoops to jump through to get the help we need.

[Therapy & support...] "Where are the services to help me get my child back? The services I speak to say 'We cant help you unless you have your child with you?!' .... but they've taken my child!"

"In the US parents get social workers assigned to them to link them into services.

Proper and thorough treatment for trauma.

"what if there was less hoops to jump through to get the help we need..."

"Long term support for the children: my child's having night terrors again.

" 'Circle of Security' was really good.

"Where is the support for the child? Money is not hitting the ground where it's needed.

Where is the help once the children are removed?

Or after they're returned  
(Or before they're removed)

"Need to be heard.

"Believe that things change: people change.

"Children can be the catalyst for change!

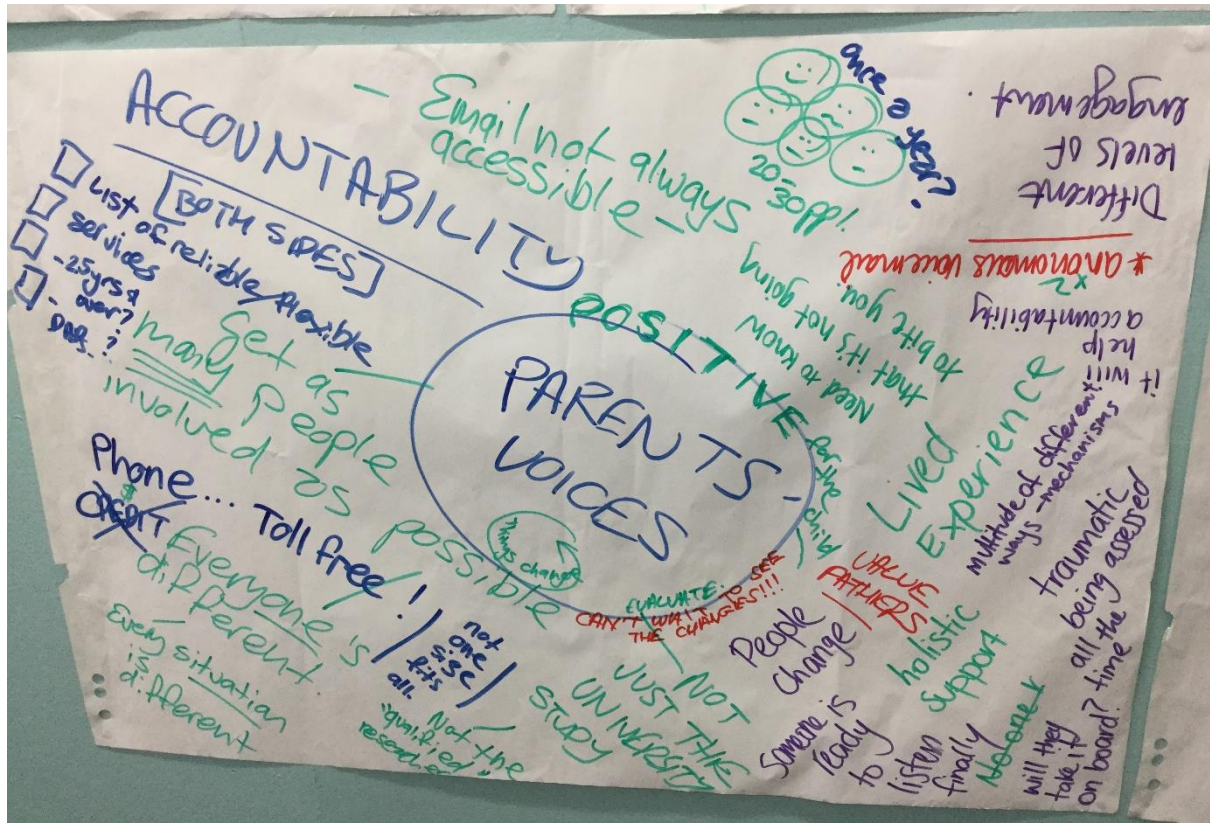
"We need more help.

**Respect** - "You need the respect there first. Respect goes a long way. Once it's there, they will listen. And it goes both ways – once there's respect: I'm onto them! Get over there! It comes back to respect and communication: *it's not about us anymore*: its about the children. Do you want your children back?! A lot of them jump up and get to it: they never look back. They come back, years later.... And thank me... they are still thanking me today.

**Put parents on every committee** - "Why are there no parents on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee? Or grandparents? There are all these people in the offices, they can all talk fine, but you need *people on the ground*. Having parents involved is a BETTER way. They are the ones who can make changes. There can be changes made out of this: the parents can do that.



Create new role / parent advocacy / resources – need an independent Support Worker – at each meeting



“Would be good to consult with those who’ve experienced this.

**Parents’ need to speak out** - “a lot of them are frightened... afraid of Child Safety and afraid to talk, when the Dept wants to talk to a parent about what it’s like on the ground. There needs to be more voices at those tables. Get them all together, parents, grandparents.... You want that strong person to stand up – to advocate. ... train you. It’s working. We need more parents at the table – and get THEM to speak. And give them guidance: you’re not alone. We’re with them.

**Young people’s voices** - “Would be good to have ex-children in care speak, now they’re adults:

“I’ve thought long and hard about what I wanted to say today: what we’re missing here is the voice of children who’ve timed out of Child Safety. They could show us how it all turns out: they’re meant to be being looked after by the Dept – there’re so much drugs.

**Set up a network. Get everyone involved** - “If you’re going to help a child, then you need to have the parents in there too... at least see if they’re willing to do it! If they can’t do it and they don’t want to do it – then we can’t force them, but let’s put it together! It’s about families! Uniting. Back together. Work with the whole lot of them... the grandparents... whoever you’ve got on board. Communication. All together.

**Parents helping parents** - “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. I sit with them all – any age – we can do this! Empower them. Know their strengths and downfalls.

**Language** - “Parent Participation” as a term .... it seems to put ‘the parent’ on the outer. Should it be “System Participation” (ie. Participation by all the parties)?

“It should be national legislation – every state must talk to parents. FIN shouldn’t exist / shouldn’t have to exist because parents views would be part of all the steps.



"I'm doing all these parenting courses: but is there anything to help *me*, to support *me*?"

**Paperwork & transparency** - "Should we / can we ask for copies of everything? Every piece of paper, every meeting?"

Phone calls are recorded for quality purposes – there are reference numbers assigned to the call: parents should be able to request a copy of the call be automatically emailed to the parents. Because other parties calls can be subpoenaed.

"Need to be more transparent. Up-front. Not 'Oh just come in to have a chat.'."

Need non-biased psychology reports.

"Parent's need to be taught about the system so they know if they are being misled"

"Include FIN from first contact with Child Safety – so parents have support from the start."

Make services more flexible, have less entry barriers:

Age precludes people (eg excludes people from a youth service)

Also excludes Dads

or if you are unable to work...

Practice should match policy

**Improve law / policy / procedures** - A procedure to make Child Safety accountable; Disciplinary procedure

"Have conversations – in neutral safe places – where it's possible for Dept to think 'Hey – this person's not like their file!!'."

"The 'tick box' of what I have to do: where is the accountability on the other side? Where is the Agreement that has the Dept and the parents both accountable for what they say they will do; when they say they will do it?"

"Stop taking babies straight after birth! Hospitals are meant to be safe places that someone could go to for help. But the hospitals are mandatory notifiers, they HAVE to notify."

**Human rights** - Need rights back in health, schools, doctors (in relation to being able to see children and make decisions in these systems).

"A system that helps families! – A Human Service worker working alongside a CSO to help with mapping parenting style / supporting parents."

"All the legislation and policies need to line up: state vs federal. Young people are 15yrs old and they can voice their opinion, 16yrs old and they have medical rights, 17yrs old they are charged as an adult... So how is it ok to take child protection guardianship orders until they're 18yrs old+ ?"

"Young people too... when they exit child safety – they're out on the street: they've got nothing. I'm on the phone every day to support these young ones."

"Help for my teenage son's mental health. Long-term therapy for the children: to break the cycle."

"Sometimes little things make a BIG difference eg. Just return phone calls."

"Have a sense of humour"

"'Best for the Child' is a confusing statement: 'Best for the Child' in whose opinion?"

"Holistic support: everything's connected. Parents have so much going on."

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## Talking with FIN &/or other parents?

"I'm here so that I can make a difference. I can't be any more broken. They can't break me any more...."

"I love coming to these meetings 'cause I can speak my mind and get it out."

"We don't want them to squash us completely..."

"Yes" to questions about having more of these kind of meetings

"We all come from different backgrounds... and then something has gone wrong somewhere along the line."

"When I had my first talk with other parents, I 'felt normal'. It's nice to know there are others."

"It makes me feel a little bit better ... it's not just me... but it's awful to know there are others who are going through this..."

"It made me feel: I'm not alone (unfortunately). I'd like to be (in a way)."

"I knew it wasn't just me!"

Parents were listening to each other and offering support and advice.

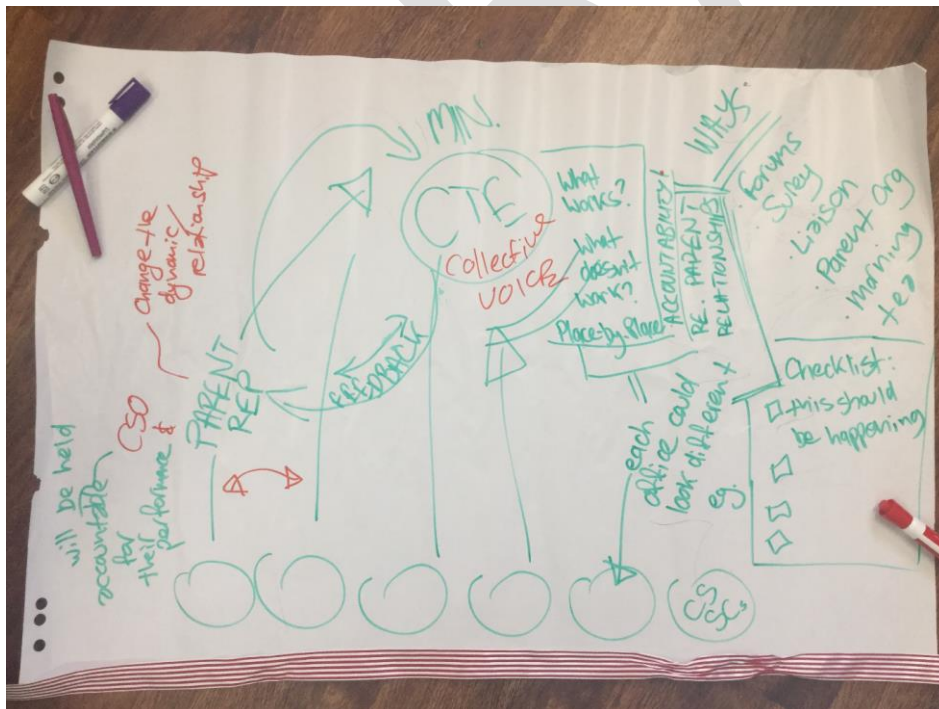
People share stories and experiences on facebook and youtube.

"I think you're a good mum"

"Great to be able to participate."

"It's good to just feel heard."

"It feels safe."



## PART 2

### *What do you think of the Minister's commitment?*

"And accountability is two-way: parents *and* the dept.

"What's the proof the voices are heard?

"I think a committee is a good idea."

"They don't want us to know."

"As a parent you want what's best for your kids."

"A lot of parents are stressed out, broken from this."

"A lot of parents will want to remain anonymous."

"A lot of parents will still be in the thick of it."

"We lead! We put our voices first; we lead the parents' voices.

"There could be groups or courses to help parents speak out?

"It will help accountability.

"Has to be PERSONAL voices: the emotion, it's real – to have the impact that's needed.

"The Dept suggested you come to this forum????????!!!!!! Wow!

"The Minister invited us herself!

"It's good: maybe something can change."

"Great that this Minister has said she wants to hear from parents: we've got a lot to say.

"Not everyone will want to deal with this, have these conversations.

"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!

"Would be great for Minister to come to the region, locally. Minister to visit? Yes please.

"just want to have honest, face to face talk"

Worry that it will be tokenistic.

No credibility if you show emotion:

Getting wound up doesn't work BUT .... if nothing changes, why not?

"Dear Minister, why do staff get shifted around so much?"

"Needs to be SAFE for parents.

Parents have had negative experiences when sharing information.

"We want CSOs to hear us.

"The power balance would need to shift if we were to be heard.

"Everyone is different: every situation is different: there may not be a "one size fits all" approach to hearing from parents.

"A lot of foster carers are not happy with the system either." "I think they would be interested."

"They could be anyone out there." In relation to carers- harm that has occurred from foster carers.

"I didn't know that". (After being informed that there is a body for foster carers.)

"I don't think parents know that". "Child safety stands in between".

"Positive Parents' Voices (parents' voices *for their child*).

Words: Parent Engagement or Parent Participation or Family Inclusion?

"It doesn't matter what it's called, as long as there's accountability and respect.

"Someone legally minded on the committee."

"Legal rep."

"parent groups have to take into account of working parents, not have everything in the day"

"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."

"Have a family day – workers with children and families"

"Invite families to parliament house – Get your voice heard, feel like you are actually heard! Then set up groups after that"

4 times per year. Face to Face!!!

Parent Working Group (not tokenistic, input into policy, procedure and guidelines – with real tangible outcomes). With 50% Parents (at least)

Who makes up the group/committee?

"Informal groups like Communities for Children"

"There are two kind of groups or Committees:

one for parents and families which is like this, sitting down and talking. The other type of group is more corporate. Its formal and more focused where it has actions and agendas. We need to be able to talk half in their language, that's when they take you seriously"

The parents need credibility It's not about their personal stuff: but still telling the stories is effective.

- Story says more than a 1,000 words
- Collect data



- Come up with common concepts
- Data should be nameless / anonymous / de-identified

"Presentation is paramount (look professional! But not necessarily everyone: be yourself)

"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

"Facts!

"Bottom up.

"How do we build trust: and relationships?

"Feedback loop!

"Location/physical space: A safe place – disconnected from "the office" (a shoe box): where there's no judging.

"Parents could be advisors on a panel, like a "Q&A"

"Needs to be parent-led.

"Committee is one thing, but she said "Talk to me directly" ..... needs to still be personal. Maybe even one-on-one?

"Assembly of Voices: CSSO + CSO + Team Leader.

Individuals will be different: Lots of parents have the confidence to have a voice; lots of parents are not ready.

"Get AS MANY PEOPLE INVOLVED as possible!

"Needs to be evaluated.

"Needs BI-PARTISAN understanding / agreement: needs the Shadow Minister to hear parents too.

"Variety of people needed: not just the university study or the 'qualified researcher'.

"Anonymity: "Name the leader! All the great people who've made change have their name out there. I don't need to be anonymous. I want to speak out. I will put my name to it.

"Different levels of engagement:

"**Creators of change**" - Some families are ok with being identified ... and having a visible seat at the table. Many others (majority?) not ok with being identified.

"Would be good for parents both in and out of the system.

"Can we hear *all* the parents? [desire to listen and understand the many experiences of peers]

"There must be SO many parents: where are they? [how to build the group?]

[Parents shown what other parents are saying] "I'm going to love reading this" "This is so interesting"

"Thank you for having more guts than [a previous Minister]."

"I wrote a petition to her."

"This is great."

“Let her know how child safety is treating us”.

“We should be on the same side.”

“Be lovely to meet the minister.”

“It would be nice for her to see some broken parents.”

“It gives parents who want to keep confidential an opportunity to still be able to say what they want.”

“Points need to have the most impact.”

“Messages can still get through.”

“Accountability”.

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## *What might a mechanism for parents voices look like?*

There are a multitude of ways to do this

- Anonymous surveys?
- Anonymous voicemail? x2
- Committee? / A Parent Organisation?
- Liaison?
- Morning Teas?
- Emails and texts?
- Human touch
- email not always accessible or even used
- Data / credit may not be available
- Toll free?
- 'Communication portals'

### **What about forums?**

"But how do we keep them going? Have them frequently enough? We need lots of voices. And there needs to be new people, turnover, to keep the issues current.

"We need to see the outcome (of what we've said, and what is done, and what is decided, and what happens next, and what we can do next...)

"Parents as teams? Help each other?

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

"Needs to be permanent: the Dept need to be accountable.

Once a year? 20-30 people?

"Need to know that it's not going to bite you.

"At the end of the day I [would] represent parents PLUS the children. It's not about ME, it's about those children. And they can't go to the meeting and talk to the Minister. That's why WE'VE got to have the voice. And if the Dept wants to make progress, they've got to listen. It can help.

Different levels of engagement:

"Do a survey to every parent in the state"

- o Flyers / letters in the mail
- o Texting, but don't expect an immediate reply
- o TV
- o Parents can write letters to the Minister
- o Do a survey and post to every family

low/subtle/once or occasional/anonymous..... to ..... high/frequent/involved/identified.

No contact...to...new to system...      ...to...      ...no longer involved.

“There must be SO many parents: where are they? [how to build the group?]

“At the end of the day I [would] represent parents PLUS the children. It’s not about ME, it’s about those children. And they can’t go to the meeting and talk to the Minister. That’s why WE’VE got to have the voice. And if the Dept wants to make progress, they’ve got to listen. It can help.

*Idea:*

*Could have 'parent liaison' ("a parent for other parents to come to") person attached to every Service Centre: someone independent. [this idea came up twice]*

*Parent Rep – needs to be a paid position.*

*Feedback should come from each office – issues from parents – would then feed up to a "Committee" (A "Collective Voice")*

*There would need to be a list of priorities, and actions, and keep the Dept accountable and transparent. The list would be: what works, what doesn't, and sorted place-by-place (because everything would be different at every office).*

*There could be a different way of connecting with parents at different offices: doesn't need to be the same.*

*The Dept would be held accountable for their performance.*

*There would be "accountability for parent relationships".*

*There would be feedback loops, lots of two-way.*

*We need to be accountable as parents and voices too.*

*There would be a budget to travel from the offices you represented to the Committee. Or to travel between offices and build relationships.*

*If you didn't feel safe to feedback through your office, you could connect to a different Service Centre.*

*Idea:*

*Get lots of people together &/or 'Compile Stories'*

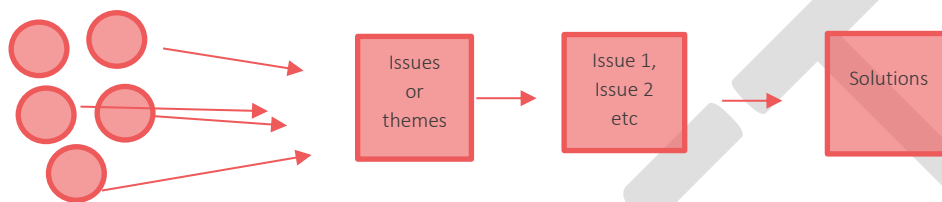
*To list/find the similar issues or themes (NOT just Child Safety – in fact not much is “safety”)*

*Group the issues (eg, Safety, Health, Ante natal, Service Centres....)*

*“Triage”*

*Then talk solutions*

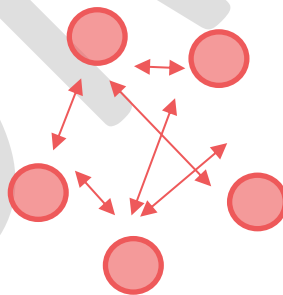
*[this idea from two groups]*



*Idea:*

*Hold A DAY with*

Parents + CSOs + CSSOs + TLs





*Idea:*

*Feedback loop!!!!*

*[from every group]*

*Parents have their say*

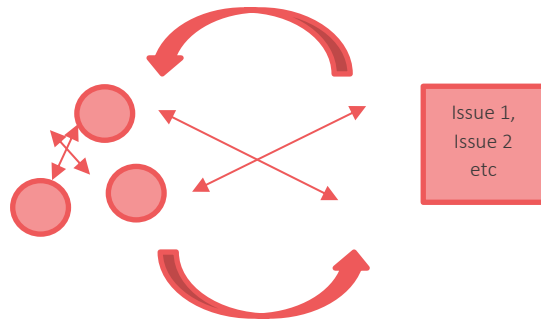
*Email (if available) &/or*

*Phone &/or*

*Face to face forum*

*Anonymous – MUST NOT AFFECT YOUR CASE!*

*Min/Dept/FIN/Parent Reps feedback - “From your responses ---- you said “xxxxxx”*



## CLOSING

### *What do I think and feel now?*

I feel heard, that someone cares.

"Connected.

On contacting FIN. "(A friend) told me to call you. "

"You guys are different from other services. I've never felt more listened to."

"Makes you feel a bit better."

"There's that feeling by helping others is sometimes how you heal."

"If you don't suicide, you just have to keep going, you just have to."

"I don't want to leave this system for my kids."

"I've always said it's a human rights issue. Huge issue. It's destroying people, destroying families. "

"Hidden crime"

"There's a lot Facebook pages but this is good because there is a lot of creative people here".

"Children can be a part of it too".

"Was good to hear other experiences... I'm now glad I've done it on my own.

"Reinforces ... coming together.

"I can't WAIT to see the changes!!

"Helps to think about others

"It's keeping the fire burning.

"Once it's over for us, it's still happening for others.

"It's not just about me, it's about others.

"Great to be able to participate.

"Great conversation – could keep talking and talking. Support groups would be a good thing.











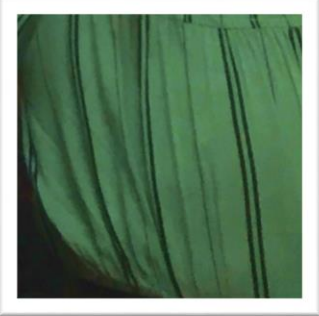
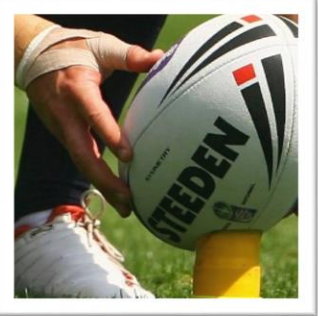
"We need to get resources together to make a noise.







PARENTS:  
*with respect and heart-felt thankyou's to:*

 <p>K</p>	 <p>O</p>	 <p>K</p>
 <p>L</p>	 <p>M</p>	 <p>A</p>
 <p>D</p>	 <p>J</p>	 <p>L</p>

 <p>M</p>	 <p>D</p>	
 <p>V</p>	 <p>C</p>	 <p>C</p>
 <p>J</p>	 <p>B</p>	 <p>M</p>
 <p>R</p>	 <p>B</p>	 <p>R</p>



 <p>S</p>	 <p>J</p>	 <p>L</p>
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 <p>H</p>	 <p>N</p>	 <p>C</p>
 <p>M</p>	 <p>M</p>	 <p>A</p>

NEXT STEPS: