



FULL TEXT RECORDING [23 PAGES] Parent Forums 2018-19 Brisbane - 26 Nov, 30 Nov, 3 Dec 2018

Key Recording Principles

(Excerpt from Engagement Principles - page 22)

- **Write-ups 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.
- **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.

PART 1

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

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

“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...

“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.

Family Inclusion Network

Valuing children. Partnering with families. Embracing Diversity.

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Family Inclusion Network facilitates opportunities for parents to be advocates for children and themselves. We resource parents and extended family members to participate and have a voice in the policies and services impacting on the lives of their children, family and community.

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“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, ...

“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.

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

“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’m not saying all parents are ‘innocent’. There are parents I’m worried about...

“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.

“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?

“Parents still have *rights*.

[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.

How it feels for me

“I’m worried in every conversation: every word...”

“So much on my file is lies.

“Feel helpless: painted as evil.

“Families feel like they’re alone.

“The system is really confusing.


“It’s traumatic being assessed all the time.

“You do the best you can.

“Too scared to ask for help.

“The parent is ***still there***.

“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.

“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.

“It took soooo 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.

“Parents need contact.

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

“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.’”

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

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

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

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.

“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.”

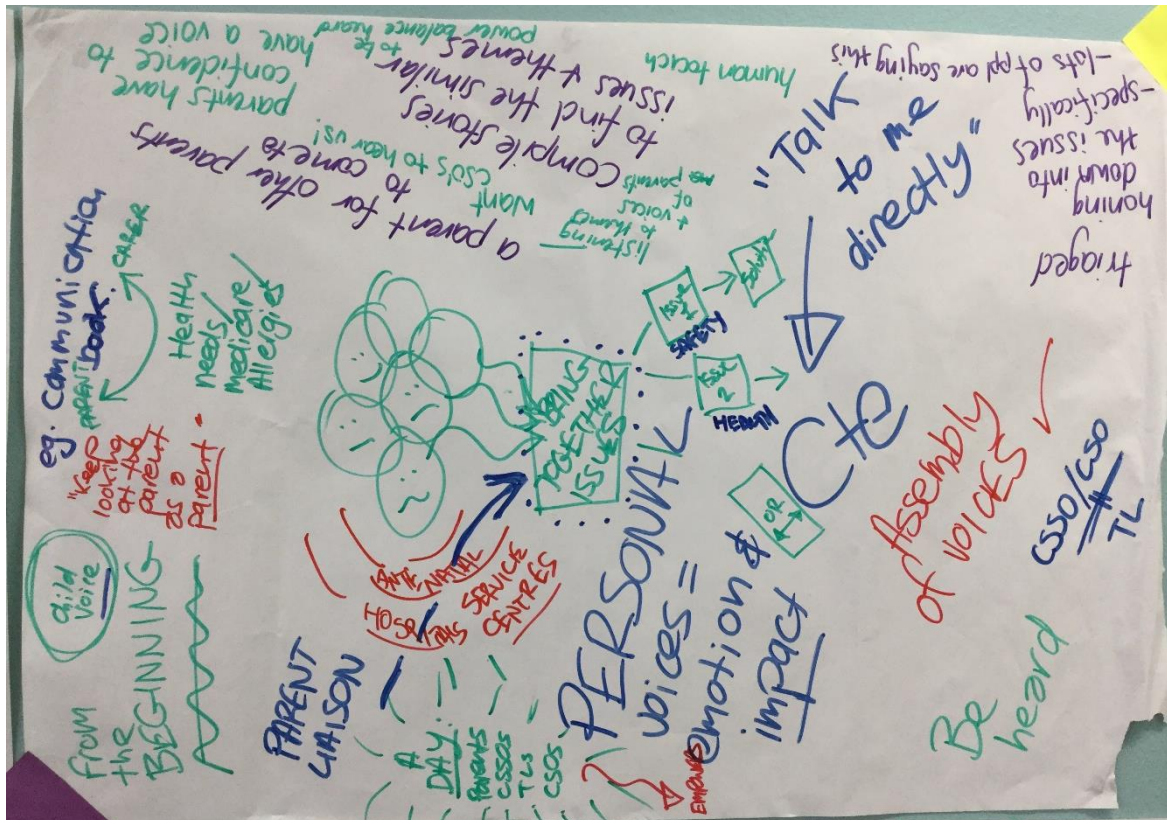
They said, “Well, you need to move to this new office, so we’re transferring you.”

“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?

“I did all the courses.... They say: ‘Just one more hurdle.’

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



"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.

"People change.

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

"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.

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

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

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.

“They were calling me ‘retarded’ ‘low IQ’... ‘no evidence I could change a nappy’.

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

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.

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.

What’s needed?

“Need to be heard.

“Believe that things change: people change.

“Children can be the catalyst for change!

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

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

“We need more help.

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

“Holistic support: everything’s connected. Parents have so much going on.

“Need a “How to get your Child back” resource.

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

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

“Value fathers 😊 <3.

“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.



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

“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.

“I’m doing all these parenting courses: but is there anything to help *me*, to support *me*?”

“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?”

[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!”

“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.

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

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

“‘Best for the Child’ is a confusing statement: ‘Best for the Child’ in whose opinion?”

“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.

“ ‘Royal Treatment’ – eg. practical things like haircuts: once a month & Christmas.

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

Proper and thorough treatment for trauma.

“Staff need to have children. I’m sorry – I say, ‘Unless you have children, what would you know?’.

“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.

“Long term support for the children: my child’s having night terrors again.

“Who do you talk to if you’re unhappy?”

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

“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+ ?

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

“Child’s voice needed from the beginning.

Make services more flexible, have less entry barriers:

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

Or excludes Dads.

Or if you are unable to work...

“ ‘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?!)

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

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

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

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

[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.

Talking with FIN &/or other parents?

“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.

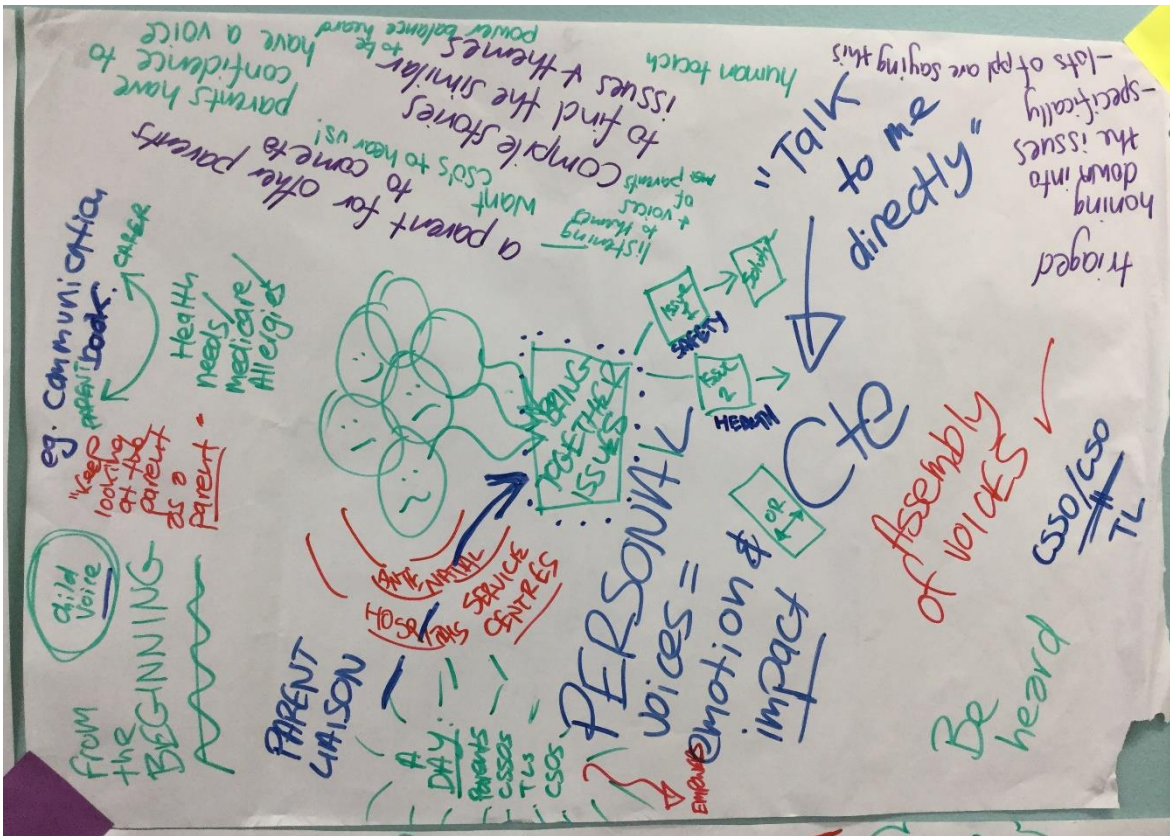
People share stories and experiences on facebook and youtube.

“What about a parent exhibition? Parents could run an art therapy workshop.

“I think you’re a good mum”

“Great to be able to participate.”





PART 2

What do you think of the Minister's commitment?

What might a mechanism for parents voices look like?

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

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

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

"It will help accountability.

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


"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.



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.

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

“How do we build trust: and relationships?

“Needs to be SAFE for parents.

Parents have had negative experiences when sharing information.

“Feedback loop!

“What’s the proof the voices are heard?

“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.

“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.

“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.



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

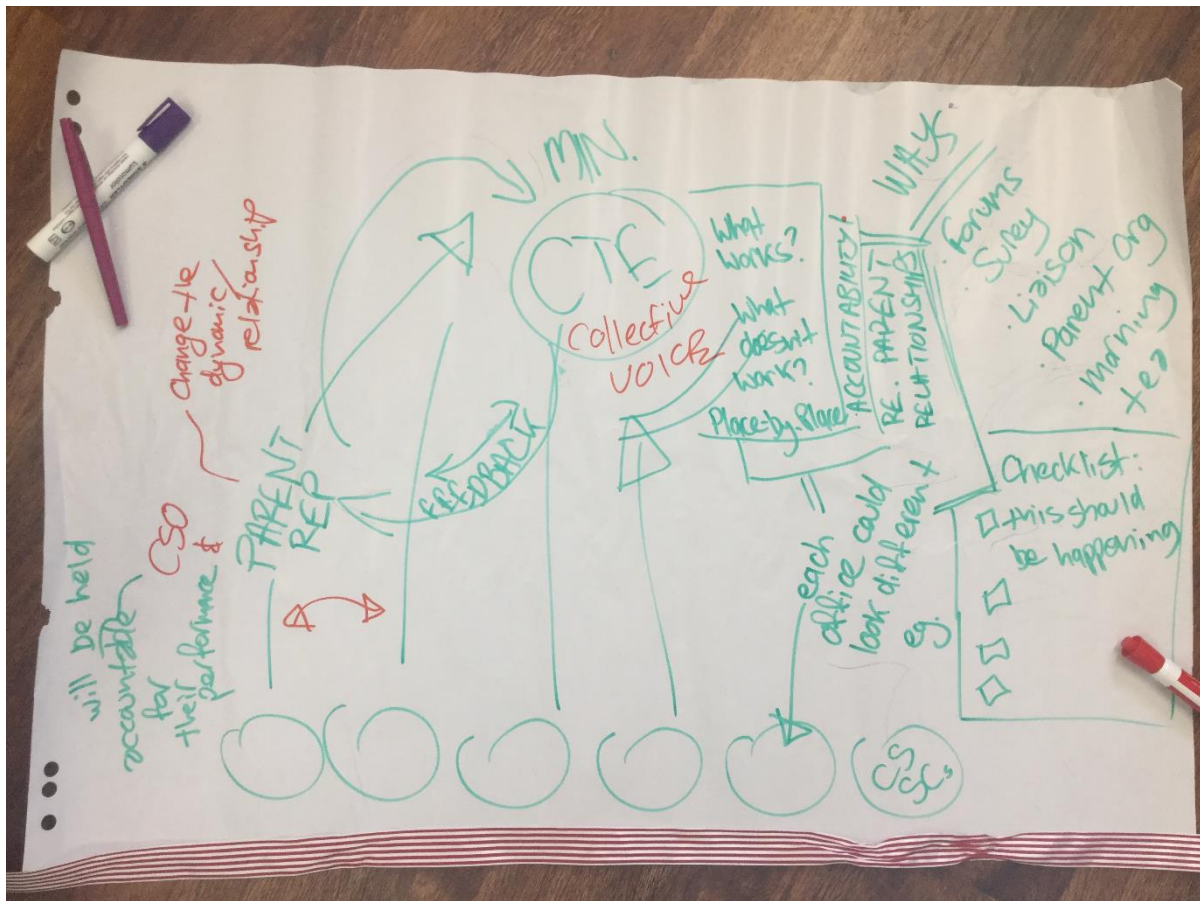
“Would be good for parents both in and out of the system.”

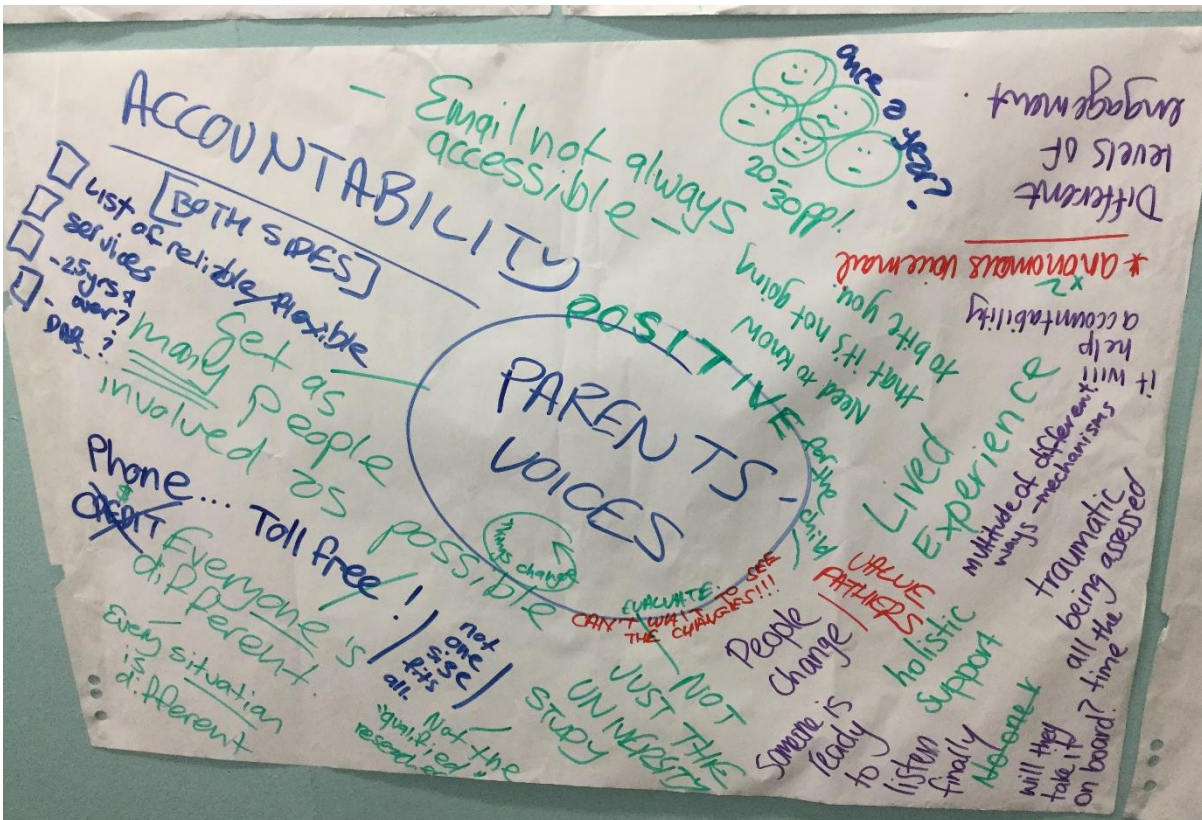
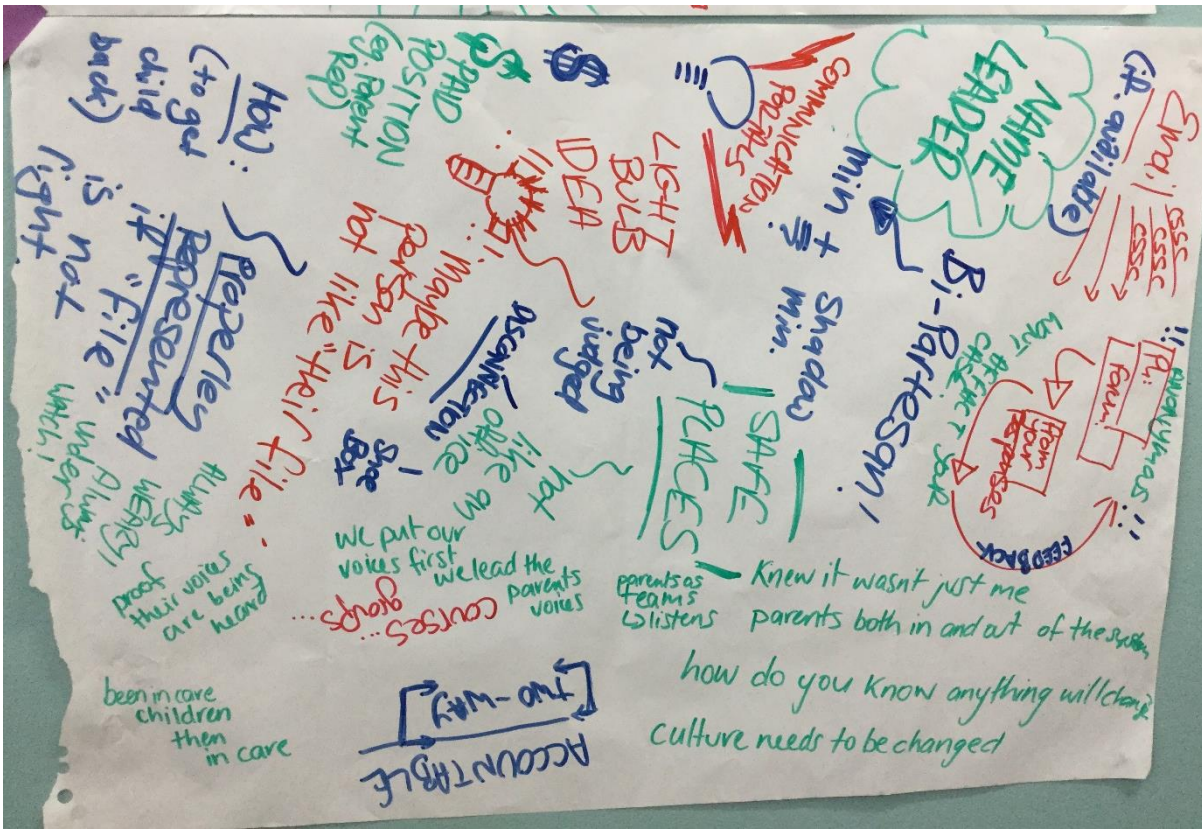


No contact...to...new to system... ..to... ..no longer involved.

“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?]”





Ways:

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 having 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, wont 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.

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'

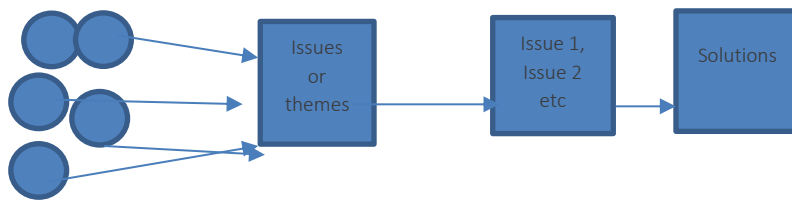
To list/find the similar issues or themes (NOT just Child Safety – in fact not much is “safety”)

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

“Triage”

Then talk solutions

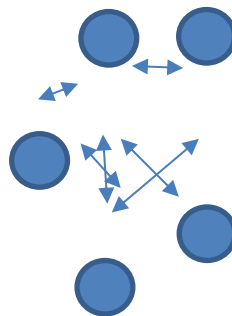
[this idea from two groups]



Idea:

Hold A DAY with

Parents + CSOs + CSSOs + TLs



Idea:

Feedback loop!!!!

[from every group]

Parents have their say

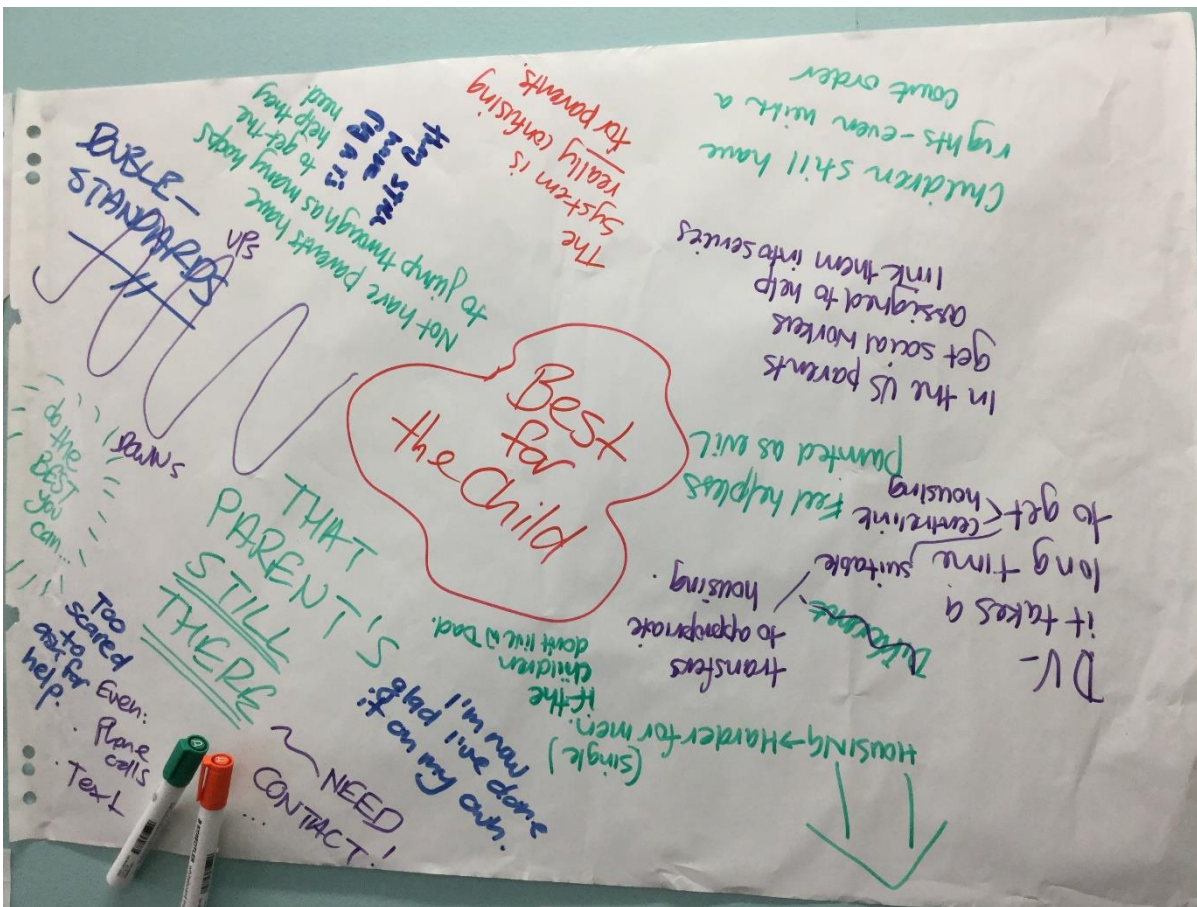
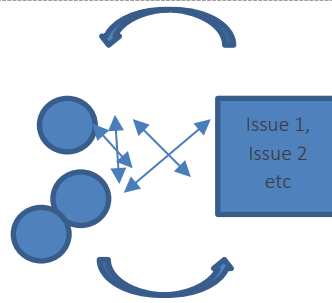
Email (if available) &/or

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.

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

"Reinforces ... coming together.

"I cant WAIT to see the changes!!

"Helps to think about others

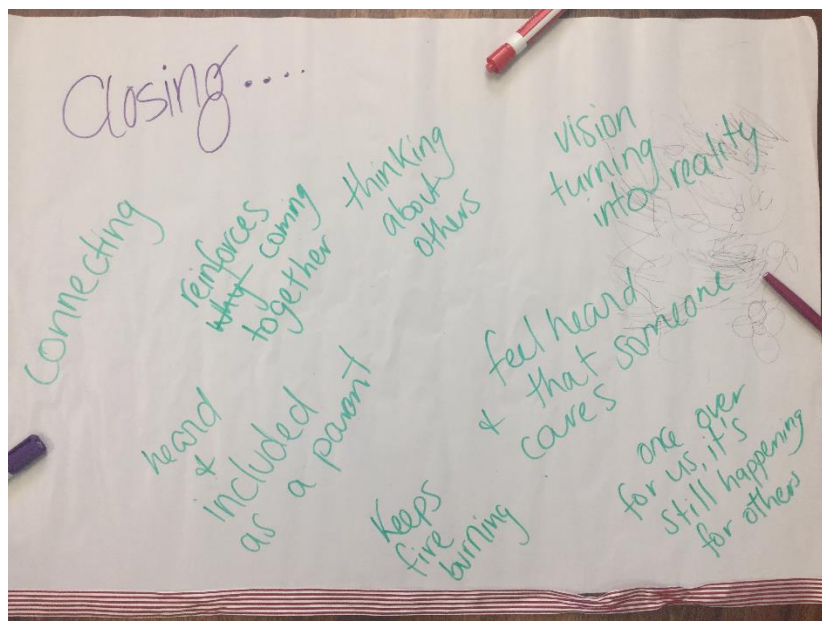
"It's keeping the fire burning.

"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.



Parent Gallery

... with respect and heart-felt thank yous to:



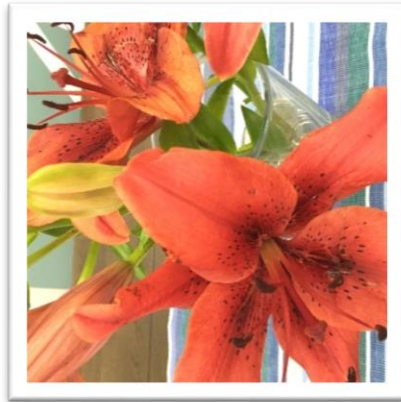
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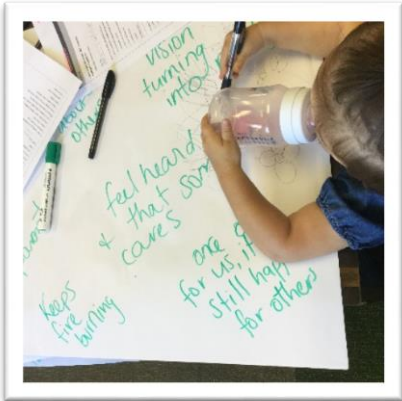
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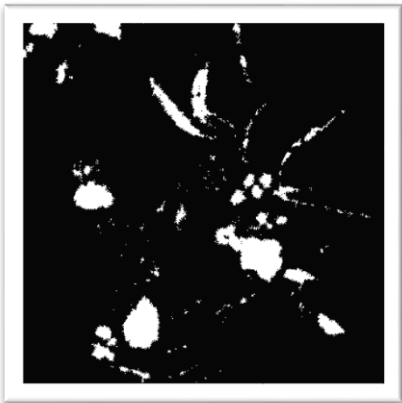
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Feedback loop:

| | |
|--|---|
| Version 1 – emailed out [date] 30/11/18 – to [No. recipients – 4] | Responses – 2 (L) amendment – actioned; (K) support |
| Version 2 – emailed out [date] 18/12/18 – to [No. recipients – 10] (incl non-ability to attends) | Responses – 0 |
| Version 3 – hardcopy provided to Dept Project Group out [31/1/19] [No. recipients – 2] | Responses – 0 |
| Version 4 FINAL – emailed to parent participants, non-ability to attend parents, and Dept champions; link on FIN website; link on FIN facebook [8/2/19] [No. recipients - >50] | Responses – tba |
| | |

Version 4 – 6/02/2019

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Parent Engagement Strategy – Principles

“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 – 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

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

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

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)

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*.

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. Ideally this would be low-key, and in the latter or second rounds of forum/s.

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 voices count. 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.

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 views are particularly sought 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.

Range of other ways to link with FIN: 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.

Confidentiality: Parents views are treated confidentially and anonymously. Demographic information (such as district, and relationship) is recorded but only used if the amount of 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.

Write-ups 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.



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[v3: revised 06/02/19]