

Shifting organisational culture to include children/young people and influence service outcomes from family law and child and family services

Child Aware Conference, Brisbane May 2017

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Family Relationship Centre, Logan QLD

Child inclusive culture at Family Relationship Centre (FRC) Logan

Family Relationship Centre Logan, opened in 2008, funded by the federal government, and operates within the UnitingCare Queensland *Child and Family Strategy Vision* for a society where all children, adults and families are living safely in thriving, resilient communities and have the opportunity to reach their potential and play a positive role in their community

The vision is informed by *Guidelines for Building the Capacity of Child Safe Organisations (DSS Families and Children)*; and *The Good Practice Guide to Child Aware Approaches (Australian Institute of Family Studies)*

The person-centred approach of the *strategy* aims for service delivery that is *inclusive, responsive, flexible and seamless*

Inclusion of children in family dispute resolution at [FRC Logan](#) up until **2013** was very low, although in principle the practitioners were very committed to child inclusive practice

In late 2013 an action research activity proposal initiated at FRC Logan to explore barriers to child inclusive FDR (CIFDR) and bring innovation to practice from leading through learning was approved by [UCQ Human Research Ethics Committee](#)

The action research activities in **2014** and emerging change brought a *cultural shift* to the team and influenced how we talk with parents about why its important to have conversations with children where parents are making decisions that are about them and will affect them

- A shift in practitioner underpinning beliefs and attitudes about the value of participation of children in keeping them safe in their family

- A shift in practice away from the requirement to “*assess and evaluate the parental capacity*” (*readiness to hear feedback from the practitioner about their children*)

- ✓ *towards valuing parents knowledge and skills*
- ✓ *building parents capacity for reflection, empathy and child sensitive parenting arrangements*

“Acknowledge and build on family strengths whilst responding to family stressors and risk factors for child abuse and neglect”

Principle 2

Child Aware Approaches and Principles: Australian Institute of Family Studies (2014)

To honour the rights of the child (*Article 12*) and *Principle 5 of Child Aware Approaches and Principles: include children as active participants in decisions that affect them* -

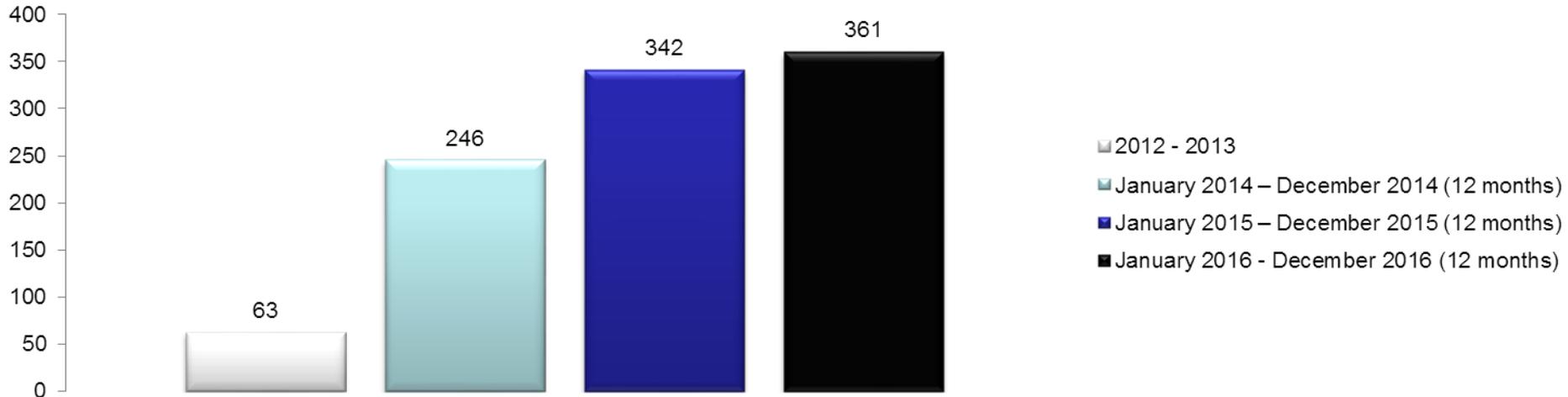
all children and young people have the opportunity to have a say about their experience of family at FRC Logan

Advanced FDR practitioners have conversations with both parents and children, bringing the *essence* of the child's experience and views to the joint parent conversation in family dispute resolution for consideration by the parents

Participation of children has increased by 450% since 2013

Family Relationship Centre Logan

Joint sibling and individual child YP Sessions 5 - 16 years Actual Participants





Honouring the Rights of the child in the family law system and child and family services

Twenty seven years have passed since Australia became a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990

Eleven years has passed since reforms to family law system brought the establishment of 65 Family Relationship Centres (2006 – 2008) for family dispute resolution outside of court

Article 12 of the UN convention was embraced as “*best interests of the child*” in the Family Law Act 1975 amendments of 2006

“Children have a right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account”

Family Law Council Report June 2016

Families with Complex needs and the intersection of the Family Law and Child Protection Systems report stated:

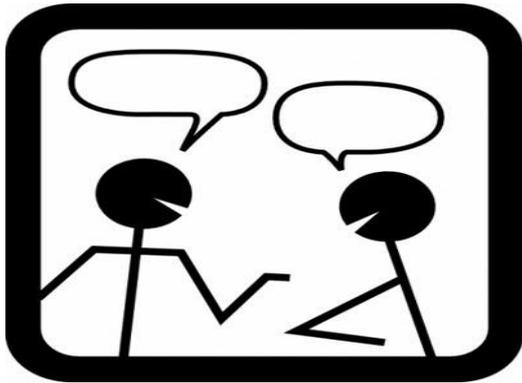
“ ensure greater respect is accorded to children’s views when assessing and responding to risk.”

“children hold strong views about their needs and the kinds of professional supports they require..... that children and young people expect to be consulted and to have their views taken seriously in relation to decisions about their post-separation care. This is consistent with **Article 12** of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory, and the guiding principles of the ***National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children***”.

Megan Mitchell, National Children's Commissioner

*“Internationally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that the right to be heard “continues to be impeded by many long-standing **practices and attitudes**”, as well as legal, social, cultural, political and economic barriers... These barriers include negative assumptions about children’s capacities and the lack of suitable environments in which children can build and demonstrate capacities..... To enable effective participation we must create safe, suitable and friendly environments where children understand the processes involved, feel comfortable expressing their views, and are provided with feedback on the decisions that are made”.*

Ever seen or heard? The voice of children in family law (2014)



How do you as professionals see organisational *culture (practices and attitudes)* having an impact on enduring low participant rates of children in the family law system and child and family services?

Group conversation

What is organisational culture

“The values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organisation.”

.....

“It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid.”

.....

“It effects the organisation’s productivity and performance.”

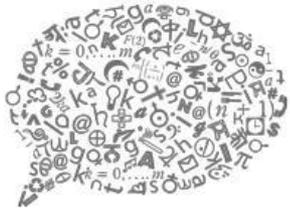
www.businessdictionary.com

A metaphor about shaping culture:

The Gorilla Tale *(Tom Siebold)*

Have you encountered this situation?





**TALKING
HEADS**

Workshop activity at table groups

1. Question for exploration: What are the barriers limiting seamless pathways for children and young people in having equal opportunity and have a say in matters directly affecting them in?
 - a) Family law system and services (1 group)
 - b) Child and Family Services (1 group)

2. Question for exploration: What are unresolved ethical perceptions and concerns about involving children and young people in processes and services where decisions are being made about them and will effect them?

3. Question for exploration: What beliefs influence individual and collective thinking in organisations – about including children and young people in discussions where decisions are being made about them?

Butchers paper - 1 scribe (5 minutes)



**TALKING
HEADS**

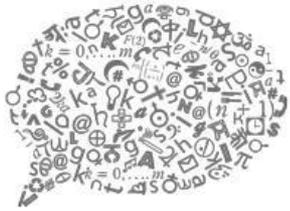
PRESENT FEEDBACK TO GROUP

*(2 people pair from each table and present
the ideas/views)*

Large group activity
(10 minutes)

Megan Mitchell, Children's Commissioner in her presentation *Ever seen or heard? The voice of children in family law (2014)* said:

*“Children who understand that they have rights, what those rights are, and who also understand that they can rely on adults to respect these rights, are both empowered and made more capable. Having their rights recognised and realised also acts as a **profound safeguarding measure for children.**”*



**TALKING
HEADS**

THINK TANK

*Being the influencers of cultural
and structural change*

Large group
(10 minutes)

Thank you for your participation in the workshop for further information or discussion contact:

Norma Williams - Program Manager Family Relationship Centre and Family Law Programs Logan SEQ

Paper: "From Research to Practice: Harnessing Evidence for Evaluating Effectiveness in Child Informed and Inclusive Family Dispute Resolution" (2016)

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