



**Being in care:
What contributes to positive outcomes for
children and young people?**

Brian Jenkins
Commission for Children and Young People
and Child Guardian (Queensland)

Child Aware Approaches Conference, Melbourne – 11-12 April 2013



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Children and Young People
Child Guardian

Queensland Commission

- Legislated role is to “Promote and protect the rights, interests and wellbeing of children in Queensland” *
 - All Queenslanders under 18 (including those in regulated environments)
 - Children who are disadvantaged or at risk of harm
 - Children in care

* *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000*



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Children and Young People
Child Guardian

Roles and responsibilities

- Promote laws, policies and practices that uphold the rights, interests and wellbeing of children, particularly those most vulnerable through:
 - research
 - community education
 - advocacy
- Monitor and review systems, legislation, policies and practices of government agencies and other service providers
- Maintain child death register, research child deaths and support the Child Death Case Review Committee



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Roles and responsibilities

- Administer blue card system (*Working with children check*).
- Resolve complaints about the delivery of services to children and young people
- Administer Commission's state-wide visiting program (Individual Advocacy and Resolution Program) for children and young people in state care



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

The Commission's Community Visitors

- Commission's Act provides for a Community Visitor, which is delivered through the Individual Advocacy and Resolution Program
- Community Visitors must visit children and young people:
 - in the care of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and placed away from home
 - residing in certain residential facilities including detention centres and mental health facilities
- Visit around 6700 children and young people
- Aim to visit each child and young person on a regular basis and when requested by the child or young person



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Community Visitors' role

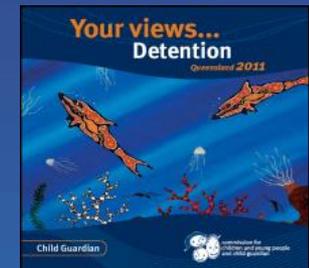
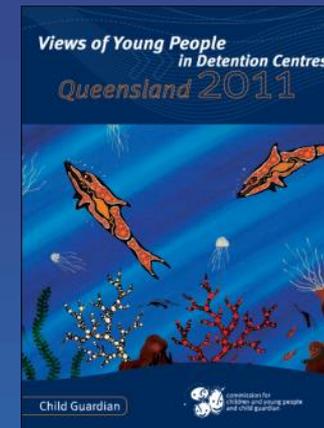
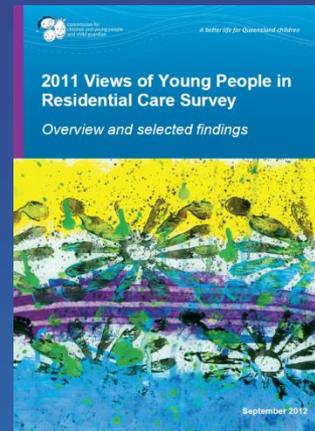
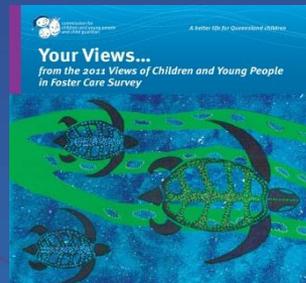
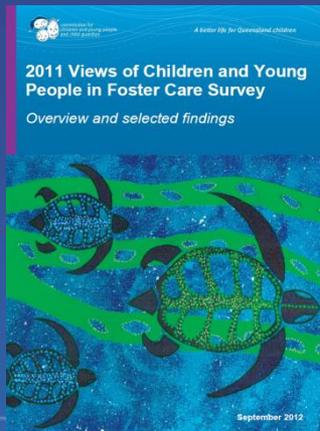
- Build trusting relationships with children and young people
- Facilitate local resolution of issues raised by children where possible
- Able to refer issues to the Department and the Commission's Complaints Team
- Gather information for systemic monitoring of child protection and youth justice systems:
 - *Child reports* - based on multiple sources - CV observation, carer statements, discussions with children and young people
 - *Views surveys* - based solely on children's and young people's responses



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Views survey series

- Established in response to a 2004 Crime and Misconduct Commission inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care.
- Allow children and young people to make a direct assessment of the quality of their care, to share their lived experience of being in care in their own words, and to have direct input into important areas of child protection policy and practice.
- Since 2006 >13,000 surveys completed.

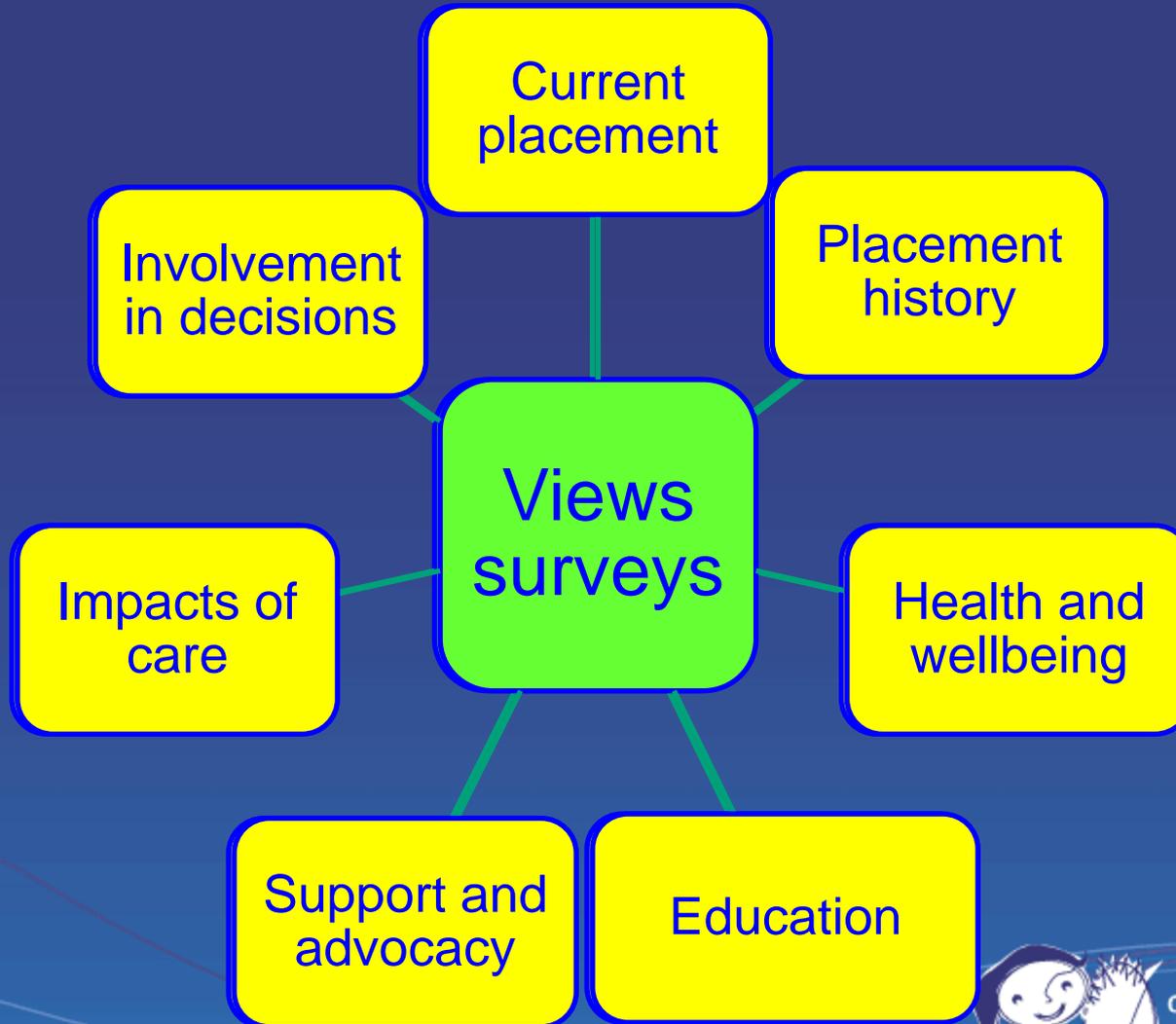


2011 Views surveys

- Three surveys about foster care
 - Children (approx 5-8 years) $n=829$
 - Young people (approx 9-18 years) $n=1180$
 - Carers (on behalf of children approx 0-4 years plus children and young people unable to express a view because of disability) $n=745$
- Two surveys about Community Visitor Program
 - Children (approx 5-8 years) $n=509$
 - Young people (approx 9-18 years) $n=783$



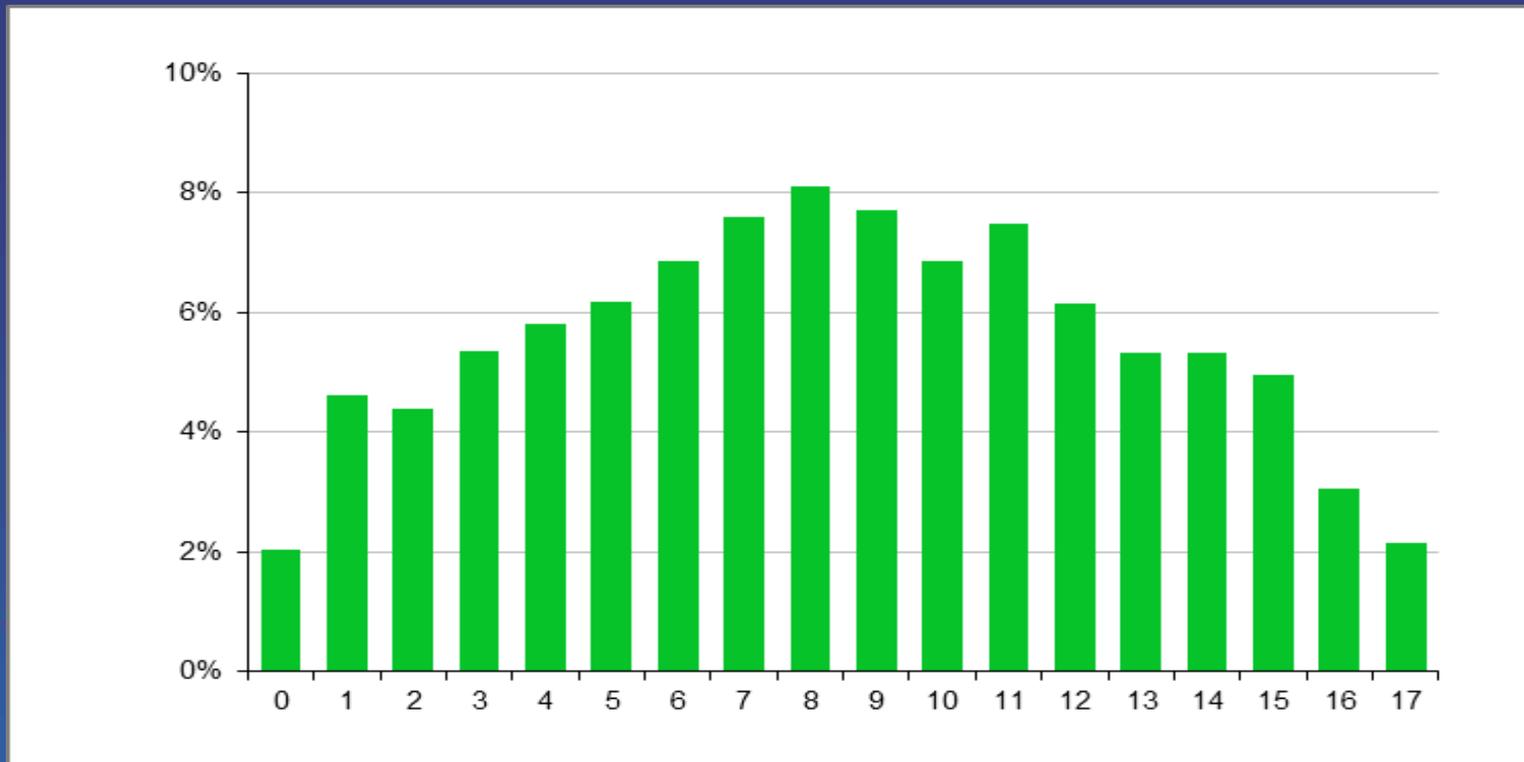
Focus of Views surveys



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Characteristics of 2011 sample ($n = 2754$)

Age in whole years – total sample



Characteristics of 2011 sample ($n = 2754$)

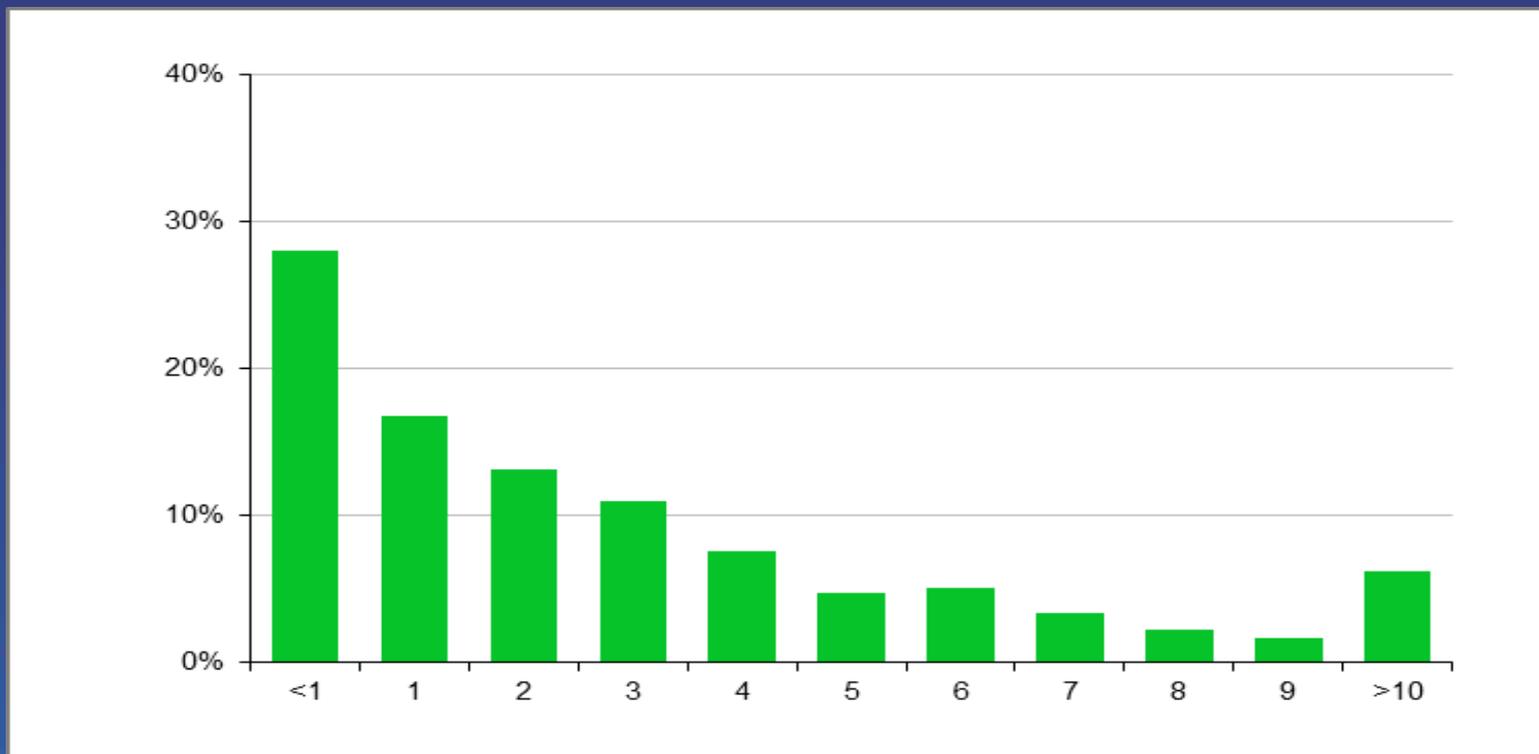
- Gender
 - 48.2% male
 - 51.8% female
- Cultural background
 - 46.8% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background
- Care type
 - 69.6% foster care
 - 28.2% kinship or relative care
 - 2.3% specialist foster care



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

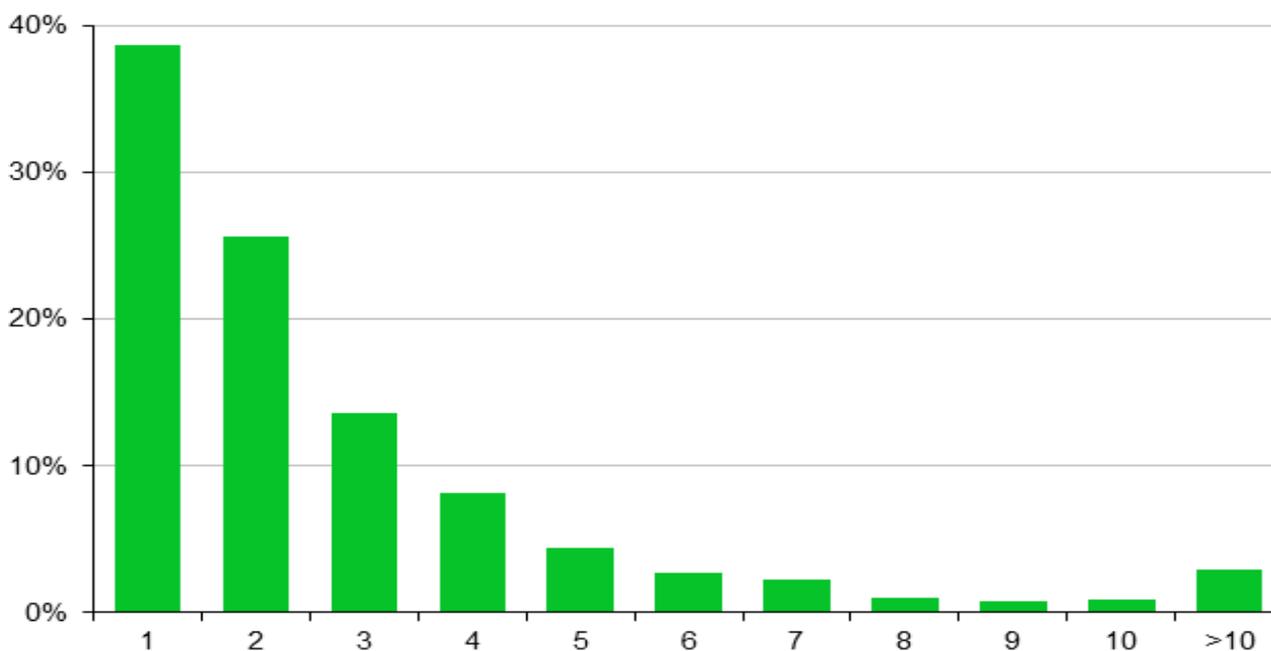
Placements – total sample

Length of current placement in whole years – total sample



Placements – total sample

Number of placements – total sample



Subjective wellbeing

- How often do you feel happy?
 - 92% young people (all or most of the time)
 - 90% children (all or most of the time)
- Happiness with placement
 - young people mean rating 8.9/10
 - 97% children (yes, happy living here)
- Feel safe
 - 98% young people
 - 98% children
- Worry
 - 31% young people (all or most of time)
 - 40% children (yes, worry 'a lot')



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Positive aspects of care

Relationships

- Carer listens
 - 97% young people (all or most of the time)
 - 97% children (yes)
- Carer treats you well/is nice
 - 99% young people
 - 99% children
- Feel you are an important person to your foster family
 - 92% young people (very or pretty important)
- Other kids like to play or be with you
 - 91% young people (most or all of the time)



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Positive aspects of care

Support

- Have someone for support
 - 94% young people (most or all of the time)
 - 96.8% children (yes)
- Can you talk to your CV about important things
 - 95% young people (all the time)
 - 98% children (yes)
- CSO listens
 - 86% young people (most or all of the time)



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Best thing about where you live (1890 comments)

- **Lifestyle and opportunities:**

- *We get to go fishing & camping & swimming & shopping.*
- *Lots of things to do. Good lifestyle.*
- *Get to visit people. Got friends.*

- **Relationship with carer:**

- *I've got all the support I need. They love me for who I am and are there for me through thick and thin.*
- *Cuddles and hugs when I am sad.*

- **Feel safe, respected, treated well:**

- *It is all safe and people that actually look after me.*
- *She treats me with respect and a bit of freedom.*

- **Being part of family:**

- *I am a big priority in the family.*
- *They treat me like family and teach me how to look after myself and good manners.*

- **Having basic needs met:**

- *Get education and food.*



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Sources of discontent

Involvement in decisions

- Decisions explained
 - 32% young people (never or not very often)
- Have a say in what happens to you
 - 32% young people (never or not very often)
- Someone explained why you came into care
 - 39% young people (no)
- Told what to expect about care
 - 52% young people (no)



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Sources of discontent

Contact with family

- Talk to family enough
 - 34% young people (want to talk to family more often)
 - 40% children (want to talk to family more often)
- See family enough
 - 47% young people (want to see their family more often)
 - 50% children (want to see their family more often)

Contact with CSOs

- See CSO enough
 - 32% young people (want to see CSO more often)
 - 46% children (want to see CSO more often)
- Can contact CSO if needed
 - 28% young people (never or not very often)



Sources of discontent

System issues

- Confident that the department will follow through with promises
 - 43% young people (no)
- Permission requirements reasonable
 - 48% young people (no)
- Can get permission on time to do things
 - 28% young people (never or not very often)
 - miss out on sleepovers, activities with friends, school activities, sport, trips with foster family.



What would make the placement better

(1639 comments – 50% ‘nothing/don’t know’)

- **Have more/do more things:**
 - *If I got more money and could have a dog.*
 - *Being able to have what normal kids have.*
- **Changes to premises:**
 - *If I was to have a larger bedroom.*
- **Better relationships:**
 - *Being part of the family a bit more.*
 - *More love.*
- **Changes to placement:**
 - *If there was someone here my own age.*
- **Treated differently:**
 - *Getting treated better like everybody else.*
- **More/less family contact**
 - *To be able to see or call my sisters and brother.*
 - *If Mum and Dad could see us whenever we/they want.*



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

How system could be improved for kids

(500+ comments young people)

- **More support/understanding /resources from department**
 - *More money for carers to support children in care.*
 - *To treat children like any other child that's not in care.*
- **Better decision making /communication processes**
 - *Getting things or information faster when needed.*
 - *Not take so long to do things.*
- **Involve/listen to kids more**
 - *Children having more of a choice in things instead of Child Safety making all the decisions.*
- **CSO issues**
 - *Keep same CSO. Regular contact with CSO.*
 - *More workers so CSOs don't have as much to do and they can talk to you.*
- **Change to contact w birth family**
 - *See their parents more often.*
 - *Not to be kept in care for so long.*
- **Foster care issues**
 - *The foster carers need to be nice and have a nice home.*



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Other related factors

Health and disability

- Self reported health and absence of health issues related to happiness generally and happiness with placement
- Absence of disability related to happiness with placement

Placement history

- Longer placements, fewer placements, and fewer failed reunifications all related to happiness with current placement

Education

- Suspensions, exclusions, unresolved problems at school, and number of schools attended all related to happiness with placement



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Key messages from research

- Most children and young people in care report feeling happy generally and specifically in their placement and feeling safe although a substantial proportion report worrying.
- Children and young people are very positive about what they experience in their placement and with their carer.
- Areas of discontent that are associated with reduced subjective wellbeing relate primarily to structural and systemic factors



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Implications for policy

- Continued support for carers – they are an important and overwhelmingly positive part of the system
- Increase children's and young people's involvement in decision making at all levels
- Reminder of how complex and intractable difficulties in the system (workload management, availability of suitable placements, educational disadvantage for children in care and health concerns) impact on children's and young people's subjective experiences.



commission for
children and young people
and child guardian

Further information

Brian Jenkins

Senior Research Officer

brian.jenkins@ccypcg.qld.gov.au

Jennifer Sanderson

Senior Research Officer

jennifer.sanderson@ccypcg.qld.gov.au

Lee Tennent

A/Manager, Research

lee.tennent@ccypcg.qld.gov.au

