

Looking forward, looking back...

The Queensland Child Protection Week Committee reflects on 30 years

Queensland Child Protection Week began 30 years ago, when parents of a young child who had been abused by a “trusted” friend asked *how can children be better supported and protected* by all the systems meant to protect them. A court reporter met with them, with concerned police and community members and formed Protect all Children Today. From that small group, the first Qld Child Protection Week Committee (QCPWC) emerged. Kay McGrath was that reporter, now a well-respected newsreader, who continues as the Ambassador for Child Protection Week and as a staunch advocate for children and young people.

The Committee’s annual campaign is launched on the 1st Sunday of September in conjunction with an Awards Ceremony, an opportunity to recognise community and professional excellence in child protection work. But excellence has not dissolved the need to continue our efforts to raise awareness, provide community events and education opportunities. The calibre of award recipients’ efforts is matched by the calibre of the committee’s membership – we are all involved because this is our business, all of ours.

Pride in the last 30 years of activity to support awareness and education about child protection is not something that sits easily for the diverse community and government agency representatives that have met for the last 30 years as the QCPWC. It is a milestone each of us would rather wish away – but the reality of children and young people needing support and protection has not vanished. What more can be done? Children and young people are still at risk, still suffering abuse and neglect, still needing each of us around the table and across Queensland to ask – what more can we do?

Every child and young person depends on an adult, in a family, at school, in an institution, in a neighbourhood or workplace. We all need to listen and own this responsibility, as the issues that impact children and young people are not new. They are older than the 30 years of our efforts. And they obviously grow in proportion to our growing population and the social issues that impact families and communities. These issues continue to be domestic and family violence, the ongoing overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the child protection system, lack of family support, and the emerging challenges of parenting and really hearing the voices of children and young people in this context.

The greatest harms to children and young people predominantly continue to be perpetrated by those who they should be able to and are asked to trust – most adults upon whom they depend for support, for basic nurture. The issues are as diverse as they are divisive but children, young people and families need our combined efforts to own and address them. And this is not just the domain of “professionals”. It requires good will and bipartisanship. Demonising and blaming those parents most in need of support does not help. Families are another institution and another opportunity to get it right for children and young people. Adults are essential in ensuring children’s safety and well-being.

The range of inquiries into child abuse and recommendations that emerge are examples of the need to remember and address all institutional abuses of children. We need to remember. We need to know that groups of Forgotten Australians continue to grow, that adults continue to abuse not just the trust of the most vulnerable children and young people, but to abuse them in horrific disregard.

We need to encourage and raise awareness throughout the year. The work of the Committee continues. And yes, we do remember and we do celebrate those individuals who are right now in care, or have been in care or involved in the child protection system. We celebrate their journey through supporting events meaningful to them, and we will

continue to celebrate their journey with those community members, family members and agency workers whose efforts support them. This is our responsibility. This is our journey.

Child Protection is *always* Everybody's Business.

What more can you do? Remember that adults are essential in ensuring children's safety and well-being. Knowing they are not heard when they speak of how they feel and what they have experienced in terms of their safety and well-being harms children and young people. Remember to pay attention to their voices. Each day, know that caring for children and keeping them safe is a shared responsibility. Come on Queensland.

For further information and resources, please access: www.childprotectionweek.com.au

Queensland Child Protection Week. 4 - 10 September 2016