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What if I told you the child protection system does work?

By Kelly Bracknell

Posted Monday, 2 September 2013

Shocking yarns sell newspapers, but for those working in the child protection system, constant stories of children being hurt, neglected or abused, without the other side of the story (children and young people doing well in the system), is sometimes hard to take.

Maybe this contributes, with the pressure of the work, to high worker and volunteer turnover in the sector. The almost uniformly negative coverage doesn't make sense to the hundreds of thousands of people doing outstanding work in the child protection system and seeing success stories every day. In a media landscape saturated with bad news stories about child safety, Child Protection Week (1-7 September) is an opportunity to look at some of the good news stories that are rarely reported.

The media takes an understandable focus on what goes wrong in child protection because bad news is often more interesting and newsworthy than good news. We get that. However, the relentless focus on bad news is disheartening for workers and volunteers who dedicate their working lives to children and families. These practitioners see success stories every day.

Mistakes are made, tragedies do occur and the system is not perfect. However, for every misstep and mistake, there are just as many good news stories about children and young people who have emerged successfully from out-of-home care.

I work for the CREATE Foundation (an organisation that represents children and young people in out-of-home care) and I chair the Queensland Child Protection Week (QCPW) committee.

Leading child protection organisations in Queensland sit on the QCPW Committee including NAPCAN, Act for Kids, PeakCare Queensland, The Daniel Morecombe Foundation, the Queensland Police Service, Family Planning Queensland and the relevant State Government bodies (to name a few). As people who are committed to the protection of children and young people in Queensland, we often see inspiring and transformative journeys of children and young people overcoming difficulty to reach their full potential. Seeing children's and young people's resilience and capacity sustains staff working in child protection.

As a young person CREATE spoke to recently said: 'You can't judge the whole care system from one traumatised boy, but by the many children who have gone right through the system and have become a success.'

The CREATE Foundation has worked with many young people who received love and support in care and are now on their way to leading successful lives.

'Lisa' is 22 and has an intellectual impairment. She had a dedicated carer who supported Lisa throughout the time Lisa was in care and during her transition to independence. Lisa speaks positively about her carer and remembers the effort and time her carer gave her. 'I know I am all grown up now, but I know my carer will always be there to help me.'

'Peter' is 18 and transitioned to independence in August this year. He completed Year 12 in 2012 and went on to start his own photography business.

Peter had a loving carer and although he is no longer legally 'in care' he still resides with his carer and family. He will soon commence photography studies at TAFE.

'Susan' is 19 and still has regular contact with her carer who continues fostering a household of five foster children. Susan is studying at university and aims to join the Queensland Police Service. She lives in share accommodation around the corner from her foster carer.

These few examples show that when a child or young person has a stable and supportive environment, their potential is limitless. It's important for the public to understand that getting involved in protecting children, instead of ignoring what doesn't affect them directly, is the key to the future of over 37,000 kids in care across Australia. Child protection is everybody's business and we all need to play our part.

Australians often read about the problems with various state and territory child protection systems. The headlines scream: 'System fails children', 'Increase in abuse cases' and 'Child protection scandal'.

During Queensland Child Protection Week, we seek to balance these headlines with just a few of the many stories where the system has worked.

At CREATE, our vision is for all children and young people with a care experience to have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Whilst we understand the headline: 'Youth in care lovingly supported in a stable home' is not as catchy, we think it could make a nice change for Australians to occasionally read about the children and young people flourishing because of the love and support they received in the much maligned child protection system.

Kelly Bracknell is a community facilitator at The Create Foundation which represents children and young people in out-of-home care. She has worked with young people with a care experience for several years and also chairs the Queensland Child Protection Week Committee.

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What if I told you the child protection system does work? : Comments

By [Kelly Bracknell](#), published 2/9/2013

The almost uniformly negative coverage doesn't make sense to the hundreds of thousands of people doing outstanding work in the child protection system and seeing success stories every day.

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It is great to read the good news article by Kelly Bracknell in On Line Opinion. Positive news must become a regular part of the media coverage as such stories bring a new perspective on this important issue and give encouragement to all stakeholders to work in partnership for better social outcomes.

Posted by [Macedonian advocacy](#), Monday, 2 September 2013 2:21:50 PM



Cant disagree with steak-holders and outcomes. Any KPIs to add, or is that not worlds best practice.

Incentivise!

Posted by [Houellebecq](#), Monday, 2 September 2013 2:39:28 PM



"The almost uniformly negative coverage doesn't make sense to the hundreds of thousands of people doing outstanding work in the child protection system and seeing success stories every day."

Surely the perspective of success depends on whether you are a breast half-full or half-empty type of person?

What is the needed multiplier factor to use, if child protection systems have hundreds of thousands of people doing outstanding work, to calculate how many tens of hundreds of thousands or millions of parents are failing to do their own work successfully?

Posted by [WmTrevor](#), Monday, 2 September 2013 7:24:06 PM



Hi Kelly,

Great to read your article !

It only takes 10-15 minutes every 3 years ,to use the preferential system and number on the Senate ballot paper the 110 candidates below the line .

Not a big ask compared to having half one's face or testicles blown-off in Afghanistan.

By doing this , you can send the only message to the major parties, that they respect .

Every major problem we face from child protection, housing, university funding, child neglect, jails, environment, manufacturing collapse, casualization of the workforce, selling public assets, massive public/private borrowings, traffic chaos, growing poverty, social security blow-outs.....(.very happy to dialogue the back stories on all this)...is made catastrophically worse by one design blunder.....POPULATION GROWTH .

By preferencing the Stable Population Party first, then your major party second (after that, just do the numbering because it won't matter), we have a chance to turn the place around.

The positive message is that we have designed the mess in, so we can design it out .

Very best Kelly ,

Ralph

Posted by **Ralph Bennett**, Monday, 2 September 2013 9:08:00 PM



Of course there is success. It can't be all bad! By the same token there's enormous room for improvement

For starters. Ms Bracknell's quoted examples are likely among the number placed in caring stable foster homes - and left there. The high worker attrition rate is mostly due to stresses associated with being unable to do the job effectively. Reasons being overwork, poor support, ineffective strategies leading to frustration and emotional meltdown. These are people at the coal face, mind. Move up the hierarchy and there will be those in cosy corners happily collecting "productivity" bonuses that are certainly not deserved.

Let's look at the success stories. What are the common factors that have produced good outcomes? What individual factors may have helped? How has management differed from other cases with far less satisfactory outcomes? What benchmarks should be set? What changes need to happen so this becomes standard practice?

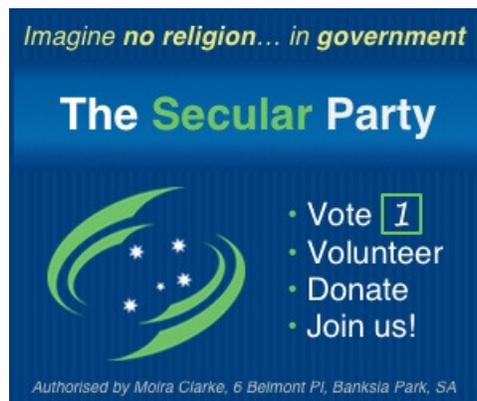
Most cases where fostering is required is on a once only basis and often for reasons other than abuse. For instance - parents who for whatever reason must be separated from children for a period of time. This is straightforward stuff - as is the incapable or unwilling parent who surrenders or abandons a child.

However there is the group of dysfunctional toxic families, usually well known to child protection agencies where children are removed then reunited over and over with a different foster carer each time - resulting in lives destroyed by systemic abuse, upheaval and instability. Children should not be further traumatized by a system that is supposed to protect them.

As one poster noted in response to a recent article on the same topic - abused or neglected animals are often treated with far greater consideration than children in similar circumstances.

It's time to reform the so-called child protection agencies - starting with some of the bogus ideologies - so that the horror stories become rarer and rarer. Until that happens, vulnerable children will continue to die or be left permanently damaged right under the noses of child welfare authorities and we'll keep reading 'shocking yarns'

Posted by **divine_msn**, Monday, 2 September 2013 10:02:35 PM



Kelly,

I guess you could be right, but I suspect it really does depend on your definition of "work." A bucket with a hole near the bottom still "works" in a sense.

"Mistakes are made, tragedies do occur and the system is not perfect. However, for every misstep and mistake, there are just as many good news stories about children and young people who have emerged successfully from out-of-home care."

So for each failure there is a success... I would hope the odds are better than that, but nonetheless, maybe you could supply us with some of those "success" stories you have alluded to.

Oh wait here they are:

"Peter" is 18 and transitioned to independence in August this year. He completed Year 12 in 2012 and went on to start his own photography business.

Peter had a loving carer and although he is no longer legally 'in care' he still resides with his carer and family. He will

soon commence photography studies at TAFE.

'Susan' is 19 and still has regular contact with her carer who continues fostering a household of five foster children. Susan is studying at university and aims to join the Queensland Police Service. She lives in share accommodation around the corner from her foster carer."

So of the thousands upon thousands of children that have been through the system, all you can give us is a boy who "went on to start his own photography business" but as yet hasn't begun to study his trade and a girl who is doing some unnamed course at Uni, and aspires to be a cop one day.

I dream of walking on the Moon one day, but I most certainly don't consider myself a "successful astronaut."

I cant help but feel that you are either having a hard time believing your own propaganda or you were just being lazy and couldn't be bothered researching before writing this.

An Ex-Foster Carer's view, rather than a Workers view on this would have made for better and more factual reading... assuming there was one willing to risk it.

Posted by **Interested_party**, Tuesday, 3 September 2013 11:41:44 AM



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