



# Putting Queensland Kids First

Submission to the Queensland Government

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## Acknowledgement

Anglicare Southern Queensland acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians and recognises their culture, history, diversity and deep connection to the land. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which our service was founded and on which our sites are operating today.

We pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders both past and present, who have influenced and supported Anglicare Southern Queensland on its journey thus far. We also extend that respect to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, clients and partners (past, present and future) and we hope we can work together to build a service that values and respects our First Nations people.

We acknowledge the past and present injustices that First Nations people have endured and seek to understand and reconcile these histories as foundational to moving forward together in unity.

Anglicare is committed to being more culturally responsive and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we are committed to embedding cultural capabilities across all facets of the organisation.

## About Anglicare Southern Queensland

Anglicare SQ's experience in identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable members of our many and varied communities is underpinned by 150 years of delivering innovative, quality care services.

More than 3,000 staff and volunteers operate across southern Queensland and in Longreach and Townsville.

We offer a comprehensive, integrated range of community services that comprises community aged care, residential aged care and community support programs, including youth justice, child safety, disability support, counselling and education, mental health, homelessness and chronic conditions. Our services are designed to 'wrap around' clients in a comprehensive way, recognising their health needs but also addressing the social needs which contribute to wellness.

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*Photo by Ben White on Unsplash*

## Introduction

Anglicare Southern Queensland (Anglicare SQ) welcomes the invitation to submit to the Queensland Government consultation to inform the proposed *Putting Queensland Kids First* package, and how it will deliver better outcomes for young Queenslanders.

We bring to this submission the direct experience and expertise of Anglicare SQ staff in working with children, young people and their families in metro, regional and rural communities across a geographic footprint double the size of the United Kingdom. This includes providing in-home family support, playgroups, social groups for children and/or adults, parenting skill programs, emotional intelligence skill groups for children, and groups supporting the transition to school.

In 2022–23, Anglicare supported 1,695 carers to provide 383,863 nights of foster and kinship care for children and young people, and 46,511 hours of support and accommodation for women and young people experiencing homelessness. We also operated 29 residential homes for children and young people in need. In Gympie, we operate the Next Steps Plus and extended care program for young people transitioning out of care. We also run an Intensive Bail Initiative that includes a range of programs that provide early intervention and diversionary support to young people.

Given this experience and the deep commitment of our staff to the wellbeing of children and young people, in February 2024 we prepared a staff survey based on the questions on the *Putting Queensland Kids First* web page at [www.qld.gov.au/about/putting-qld-kids-first](http://www.qld.gov.au/about/putting-qld-kids-first)

The survey was not intended to be representative of the broader Queensland community, and the results are not statistically rigorous. Rather, we wanted to provide an opportunity for our own Anglicare community to share their hopes for and opinions on how to ensure a thriving future for our youngest Queenslanders.

Through the survey, staff acknowledged the critical role of systemic challenges such as housing, access to education, and poverty in influencing the life chances of our children and young people; as well as noting the importance of prevention and early intervention strategies such as parenting and educational support programs.



The Anglicare Putting Queensland Kids First staff survey

Anglicare is pleased to acknowledge the holistic approach of the *Consultation Draft*, which recognises the importance of addressing systemic barriers as well as focusing on specific supports for children, young people and their families. This

dual priority also shapes our own submission, as well as contributions we have made to previous related inquiries at state and federal level.

In this document, we draw on previous Anglicare SQ submissions to the Queensland Government Youth Justice Reform Select Committee consultation and the Australian Government *Early Years Strategy* consultation; as well as other strategies and frameworks designed to ensure that “all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation”.<sup>1</sup>

## Qu. 1 Core principles

*What are the core principles you think should inform our early intervention and prevention approach to support children, young people and families?*

Anglicare SQ supports the core principles outlined in the Consultation Draft. They are strongly reflected in the vision for and hopes that our staff hold for children and young people in Queensland:

*My hope is:*

- *My biggest hope for children is that they can have their basic needs covered — housing, food, education, affordable access to the health system and a safe and loving home life. Beyond that, teachers who are trauma-informed and support for parents who need it to raise healthy children.*
- *That all children will live in a safe environment with equitable access to quality education, supports and services provided in a timely manner.*
- *Having connections (to family and wider community). Having access to allied health and general health.*
- *That families feel supported and are given opportunities to develop their parenting skills and knowledge of their child’s development.*

### *Universal supports*

One of the recurring themes in staff input was the need for all children and young people to have access to the basics of a satisfactory life, ensuring that children are warm, well-fed and housed appropriately.

As the *Consultation Draft* points out, the evidence is incontrovertible that poverty diminishes the lives of young children now, and into their future. Toni Wren, Executive Director, Anti-Poverty Week, recently highlighted just a few of the many sources that demonstrate this fact:<sup>2</sup>

- The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) found that growing up in poverty is a strong predictor of a child being developmentally vulnerable by the time they start school. In 2021, more than 1 in 5 Australian children were

assessed as developmentally vulnerable; and more than one third from the most disadvantaged postcodes.<sup>3</sup>

- Melbourne University research found that:

*Experiencing just a single year of poverty during childhood is associated with poorer socio-economic outcomes in terms of educational attainment, labour market performance and even overall life satisfaction in early adulthood. Children from poor households are 3.3 times more likely to suffer adult poverty than those who grew up in 'never poor' households.<sup>4</sup>*

This critical factor is fleetingly referenced in the core principles as follows: 'Prevention and early intervention services through a mix of *universal*, targeted and intensive supports' but deserves more emphasis. As we have noted in previous submissions:

*No child can grow and learn and thrive, no matter how good the program, when they come to kindy with an empty stomach.*

### *Acknowledging trauma*

Anglicare staff strongly support a child- and young person-centric approach. For a very significant number of Queensland children and young people, this needs to include explicit recognition of the myriad ways that trauma impacts their lives, including mental and physical health, family and community relationships, and education opportunities.

We suggest that these effects are pervasive and serious enough that the right of children and young people to live trauma-free should be included in the core principles. This would provide further impetus for trauma-informed prevention and intervention initiatives across multiple sectors to be included in the *Putting Queensland Kids First* package

## **Qu. 2 Key protective factors**

*What are the key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories, and how can we further boost these?*

As mentioned above, in 2023 Anglicare SQ provided a submission to the Australian Government consultation to inform a new *Early Years Strategy*, in recognition of the vital importance of the first five years of every child's life.

Staff input to that submission highlighted what they considered the most important factors that would set up our children for a good life. We define 'a good life' here as one that is undiminished by disadvantage, where children and young people have the best chance of staying on a positive pathway and reaching their potential.

For our staff, the most compelling (although by no means only) protective factors were those in figure 1:<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1: Anglicare staff priorities for a 'good start' in early childhood

Staff comments expanded upon these issues, highlighting the key protective role of related factors such as positive connections to community, and access to health and social care. It is noteworthy how many references emerged to the role of schools, the appropriateness of education, and the need to support pathways to a satisfying future. Many staff included suggestions for related initiatives, as below.

### Protective factors for a good life

#### *Parenting support and skill development*

- *community programs and activities available to low income families to give children opportunities that they would not normally get*
- *community programs and activities to provide healthy role modelling and positive outlets for behaviour*
- *more counselling services available in schools*
- *employment schemes for parents to boost skills and confidence.*

*I feel it is important for children and young people to have real connections with others where they feel valued and safe and to feel part of the community and for them to feel the importance of their contribution, no matter how small. We can boost that sense of connection by there being more free groups, clubs and mentors in the school community.*

*Accessible mental health services — culturally and age appropriate.*

*Accessible systems and engaging information that supports positive development in health and wellbeing, education, training and employment, housing, connection to family and community as well as fostering a willingness and understanding/need to engage.*

*Consistent, easily available support for parents from antenatal through to early tertiary/trade/employment.*

*Supporting positive transitioning to kindy, primary, secondary and tertiary education.*

*Integration that allows for a team approach to educating young people in acknowledgment of their individual development and in awareness of their family and cultural environments*

## *Positive trajectories for young people at risk of offending*

There has been significant focus by the Queensland Government and in the community in recent years on how children and young people might be directed toward 'positive trajectories' in life, and particularly on ways to address youth offending.

Special attention has been directed to the approximately 400 children who persistently offend in Queensland. As the Government's own reports and strategies have pointed out on multiple occasions, these are also the most disadvantaged of our children, with risk factors that include experience of poverty, family violence, unstable accommodation or homelessness, disrupted education, exposure to alcohol and substance misuse and histories of familial offending and/or involvement with the child protection system. While offending and recidivism are rarely the result of a single risk factor — poverty or a low education level in themselves, for example, do not predict offending behaviour — *clusters* of risk factors combined generate a higher risk of recidivism.<sup>6</sup>

As the diagram on pp. 12-13 of the *Putting Queensland Kids First Consultation Draft* suggests, putting in place prevention, early intervention and diversion initiatives, both system-level and program-specific, that break this cycle of disadvantage and strengthen protective mechanisms is the most effective way to reduce child and youth offending and re-offending. We addressed this point in detail in our [recent submission](#) to the Queensland Government Youth Justice Reform Select Committee consultation.<sup>7</sup>

The following section highlights some of the key protective factors identified in that submission, drawing on the views of young people from the Anglicare SQ Integrated Bail Initiative (IBI) (see Box 1 below).

### **The views of young people involved with the youth justice system**

Given that young people with experience of the youth justice system are most directly impacted by the decisions of adults who determine youth justice priorities and policy, we sought their direct input on what factors would be most effective in changing their trajectory in life.

Trusted youth workers asked young people in the IBI program a series of questions, including the following:<sup>8</sup>

#### **What was/could have been the 1-2 most powerful things that would keep/have kept you from being involved in offending behaviour?**

The young people's answers appear below. The importance of positive relationships with family and friends was key. The young people worried about the impact of their behaviour on family, wanting to be a role model for younger siblings. They mentioned the helpful influence of people they loved and respected; and the value of simply 'staying home' with people and pets they care about.

Their answers clearly reveal the significance of family connection as a key protective factor, and the value of investing in families of all kinds and at all stages.

### The most powerful things that kept me from offending behaviour: family, friends and home

- *My girlfriend would advise not to take part in crime*
- *My dad would encourage me to make the right decision*
- *Worried about impact on family*
- *If I had a good relationship with my family that would have helped me. But sometimes I fight with my dad and feel like I can't go home. But also I needed more help with my drug use. When I'm in community my drug use is what makes me offend. And the biggest things that have helped me not offend have been Anglicare and my ICM worker with Youth Justice on the Gold Coast.*
- *And my mum. I wouldn't be where I am today without my mum. She came with me to everything and told me all the time that she didn't want to see me at court again*
- *Finding a new group of friends*
- *Staying home*
- *My dog*
- *My little brother, trying to be a good role model for him*
- *Staying home with girlfriend*
- *Having support from family and being provided with a good environment eg They were removed from family and placed into grandparents care. My older sister didn't have a good environment and ran away from home and got into drugs.*
- *Having positive peer influence*

Other support systems also featured strongly in the young people's answers — help and guidance from organisations like Anglicare, Transition2Success and other Youth Justice programs; and the value of employment:

### The most powerful things that kept me from offending behaviour: other supports

- *Mindset change from employment – feeling of worth*
- *Getting help from Anglicare, Youth Justice*
- *Regular check ins*
- *A different mindset*
- *Being linked in with IBI Logan*
- *Inspirations – you know, like quotes and positive people on social media*
- *Anglicare – my worker always reminded me that offending wasn't worth it*
- *My worker reminded me that I could do better things with my life*

## About the Intensive Bail Initiative

The IBI works collaboratively across sectors to support 10–17 year olds who are among the small proportion of young people in Queensland at significant risk of serious and long-term offending.

The program is based on a belief that no single agency alone can achieve positive outcomes for vulnerable young people. We have a strong partnership with the Department of Youth Justice, that includes joint training, recruitment processes and multi-agency panels; and we are an official secondary partner to Street CRED, a QPS initiative. This is a multi-agency holistic approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable young people on the street and provides assertive outreach, including a street patrol on Thursday nights.

We also partner internally to leverage the depth and breadth of Anglicare SQ's services, including food supports and the Thread Together 'mobile wardrobe', which provides choice and dignity for young people to select brand new clothing as needed.

The IBI program has multiple components:

- Bail Support Services aim to address the reasons behind young people being remanded in custody by connecting them to critical supports and people in their community; providing the required support and interventions to young people; and increasing the confidence of the court or police that a young person will comply with the conditions of their bail. In 2022, BSS supported 190 young people.
- The After Hours Community Based Co-Responder is available to provide support and connection to services out of hours, including during times of crisis, and in response to call outs from the Queensland Police Service and the Youth Justice Co-Responder. In 2022, the community co-responder supported 99 young people.
- The Hub was until very recently a drop in space within our Gold Coast program for young people who are still largely 'precontemplative'. This has been highly effective in developing trust and informal connections between the young people and the youth workers — every interaction is a chance for an intervention. The hub is a safe place for basic needs to be met, such as food, showers, clothing, and someone to 'have a yarn with' (see figure 1 above).
- The Intensive Family Partnership prioritises family members of young people who are deemed serious recidivist offenders, with complex and extreme needs. It is focused on practical problem solving and improving safety and living conditions at home; and involves intensive case work to support young people and their families to identify practical supports that will keep young people out of custody. In 2022, the Intensive Family Partnership supported 28 families.

### Qu. 3 Investment priorities

*Are there any other priorities you think that Putting Queensland Kids First should consider?*

Anglicare staff support the further priorities identified in the *Consultation Draft*.

An additional comment relates to the immense social, economic and geographic diversity of Queensland, and the need to explicitly consider local and regional circumstances that impact on children and young people across the state.

As well as being informed by reliable sources such as SEIFA, Australian Bureau of Statistics and local government data, investment priorities for program development and related activity need to be shaped by meaningful input from the community, both potential clients/participants and human services sector staff who work closely and build relationships within communities. Investment into prevention and early intervention is most likely to reap rewards when it meets the specific needs of those it targets.

### Qu. 4 Connection to culture and community

*How can we best support connection to culture and community for children, young people and families?*

We agree that the proposed *Putting Queensland Kids First* package provides opportunities to further foster children and young people's sense of belonging and connection to culture and community; and we were pleased to see the breadth of opportunities identified across the spheres of family and community; health and wellbeing; and learning, education and training.

Many of the opportunities suggested by our staff are consistent with those themes, and the initiatives suggested in the *Consultation Draft*.

- *Integrated programs within mainstream schools where there are culturally specific classes and programs that complement student learning and development. More training and support for teachers.*
- *Involving Elders in schools, linking children to cultural activities and extended community. Growing and celebrating a culture of diversity and inclusion, and supporting family members in engagement processes.*
- *Funding more free community events and the opening of hubs and social groups so families in community can get together and connect with others in a safe secure supportive space, which may lead to the natural growth of role models for children, young people and families.*
- *More programs that focus on linking children and young people to their culture — for example, having cultural support workers in every family service program.*

- *Collate existing programs to know what is already available, and extend and support programs already operating successfully. Value input from those already working to support community connections.*
- *Supporting workers to develop better knowledge of the cultural background of those they are working with, eg what parenting looks like, cultural norms. Providing information and program material in other languages, resources and easier channels to link with local Elders and others.*

## Qu. 5 Partnership

*What would it look like for us to work together as partners, all committed to improving outcomes for children and young people?*

Establishing genuine partnerships across government and with the community is an ongoing challenge. Anglicare supports the intent and opportunities highlighted in the *Consultation Draft*, and strongly encourages active exploration of, and investment in, partnerships and collaboration at multiple levels and across sectors.

Our staff make the following practical suggestions for further ways in which government and community might work together, and break down silos:

- *Reducing competitiveness of funding and increasing funding stability, to better support collaboration and therefore provide better support for families and communities.*
- *Being responsive to changes (eg growth) in communities, including extending funding regions and/or amounts to adequately and flexibly meet emerging need.*
- *Amalgamations of government and non-government services working together would provide a stronger and more holistic approach for families, enabling all required services to be met in a timely manner.*
- *Partnership is more achievable in rural and remote regions where connections already exist or are more readily established. Often connections are stifled by red tape and generalisations of policies and procedures designed for more populated areas. Perhaps starting integration in less populated areas to gather information and identify issues would be a novel approach rather than designing strategies around a table in Southeast Queensland.*
- *A mental health example — break down the silos, making it easier to refer clients who need mental health professional intervention to government facilities/programs; utilising NGO programs as 'step down services', and making it easier to give lower level supports to fit back into routines/schools/community. Offering better ways to gain diagnoses for those who require them at lower cost. Mental health professionals working with schools (in particular) to build*

behavioural management strategies, or refer to more focussed programs to support normal development and education goals.

- All sectors have to work together with a clear [shared] approach in order to achieve this goal.
- Need integration of services and sharing of resources and knowledge across the field — from departmental levels ‘down’ and from those with direct contact with families, ‘up’.

### Collective impact, owned by communities

We suggest that the *Putting Queensland Kids First* package would also benefit strongly from expanded funding for place-based child-focused initiatives and approaches, where communities are inspired, as a collective, to take ownership of the wellbeing of their own children. Such cross-sectoral, cross-community partnerships would also provide a rich database of evidence about initiatives that work — or don’t work — for sharing with both government and community; and inform policy and program development on an ongoing basis.

The Logan Together initiative is a community movement committed to the wellbeing of every child in the city of Logan, from 0–8 years of age. Through its Splash! event in 2022,<sup>9</sup> bringing together more than 600 Logan residents, service providers, academics and funders, as well as ongoing activity, Logan Together provides an outstanding example of grassroots collaboration genuinely informing community-wide strategy and action.

Every child. Every opportunity.

Our big goal is to see Logan's children happy and healthy for generations to come.



## A final word

The proposed *Putting Queensland Kids First* package builds on no shortage of strategies, action plans, research and frameworks developed with decades of attention to the wellbeing of children and young people. Still, far too many of our children are struggling developmentally. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly at risk, as are First Nations children, children in rural, regional and remote areas, children with language backgrounds other than English, and children with a disability.<sup>10</sup>

The *Putting Queensland Kids First* package needs to be the one that makes a difference. It needs genuine political will, accountability, collaboration and appropriate funding to turn good intentions into real on-the-ground action that will make a difference in the lives of Queensland children, young people, families and communities now and into the future.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>6</sup> Latessa, E. and Lowenkamp, C. 2005. What are criminogenic needs and why are they important? Ohio Judicial Conference, *For the Record*, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter. [ojj.la.gov/ojj/files/What\\_Are\\_Criminogenic\\_Needs.pdf](http://ojj.la.gov/ojj/files/What_Are_Criminogenic_Needs.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> Wood, L. 2024. *Anglicare Southern Queensland Submission to Youth Justice Reform Select Committee Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland*. [documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/YJRSC-6004/YJRSC-54D8/submissions/00000094.pdf](http://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/YJRSC-6004/YJRSC-54D8/submissions/00000094.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> The young people’s answers could relate to single or multiple factors, and could be a single incident or a general comment.
- <sup>9</sup> Logan Together website, Splash! [www.logantogogether.org.au/splash](http://www.logantogogether.org.au/splash)
- <sup>10</sup> Australian Government. 2023. *The Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper*. Canberra: Department of Social Services, p. 10.