

ACT FOR KIDS

Formerly known as the Abused Child Trust



NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2011

ISSUE #53

Worrying state of kids in care

Each state and territory has a statutory body that promotes and protects the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people, particularly those who are in the care of the state.

These organisations are independent of government departments and other agencies. They oversee the child safety and youth justice systems, administered by governments, and work to resolve issues impacting on the best interests of children and young people.

Since 2006, the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian has conducted an annual survey of children and young people in out-of-home care to explore their perceptions and experiences, and monitor changes in these over time. It is the largest repeated cross-sectional longitudinal study of its kind involving the direct participation of children and young people in state care. The shared findings provide a critical perspective on the effectiveness of Queensland's child protection and youth justice systems.

Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care, Queensland, 2010 had 2,727 respondents, with approximately 66% in foster care, 29% in kinship care and 28% of Indigenous background. The Commission has identified areas of strength and weakness and focused discussion on what it considers to be the most notable findings.

Subjective wellbeing

Subjective wellbeing refers to how children and young people feel about their own wellbeing and usually relates to happiness, safety, health, worry, having people who care and experiences at school. The majority of respondents consider themselves to be happy, and most feel loved and cared for by someone and are safe and happy in their out-of-home care placement.

Health

While the majority of children and young people reported they are healthy, findings suggest that considerable numbers appear to have a variety of unmet mental and physical health needs. An alarmingly high number of respondents are reported to be taking ADHD medication – around 16% of young people, 15% of children and 7% of young children.

**More than
33% reported
worrying most
or all of the time,
and almost 50%
worry about
things a lot.**



This is a genuine concern; draft guidelines from the Royal Australian College of Physicians advise that a pharmacological intervention is not appropriate for children less than six years of age because of the high risk of misdiagnosis. The guidelines suggest that only specialist paediatricians or child psychiatrists should assess ADHD, taking into account comorbidities, family dynamics and cultural or religious diversity. Medication should only be prescribed when symptoms are pervasive across a range of settings and result in significant social, academic or behavioural impairment.

Education

School can be a stable grounding for children whose lives have been uprooted, and happiness at school is recognised as a key indicator of children's subjective wellbeing. The findings show that many children and young people in out-of-home care find school very challenging. Around one third of respondents experience bullying, difficulties with school work, problems with their own behaviour and problems with teachers.

More than 25% of young people have repeated a year at school, at least once. Disciplinary action is also common with 40% having been suspended and almost 10% formally expelled. Considerable instability in schooling was also noted with 40% having attended more than three primary schools. Research suggests that high quality early childhood programs are not only essential for young children's learning and development, it also provides a caring and consistent environment in which their health and wellbeing can be closely monitored.

Placement history

Stability in home environment and care-givers is integral to children's and young people's wellbeing. Despite being happy in their current placements, a considerable proportion of respondents don't have this sense

of stability. Around 20% of young people worry about moving placements in the near future, and almost as many reported failed reunifications with their parents.

Impacts of being in care

A genuine positive taken away from the survey is that on average young people rated their placements 8.8 out of 10, with the majority scoring their carers 10 out of 10. Given the important and nurturing role carers play helping children and young people recover from trauma, maltreatment and disrupted attachments, this is very encouraging.

Many still report missing their family, and sadly around 20% reported that they are made to feel different all or most of the time because they are in care. Slow departmental responses and general confusion around permission requirements are also a frustration of both young people and carers, consistent with previous surveys.

What does it mean?

The findings point to further improvements that need to be made in the best interests of children and young people. However there have been some positive improvements, most notably in relation to Education Support Plans and perceptions of Child Safety Officers, and the Commission has commended these gains.

ACT for Kids takes renewed energy and determination from these results. With your support we will continue working towards better outcomes for children and young people who have experienced child abuse and neglect. While our free professional therapy to treat and help heal those most affected by trauma will always be a key focus, we also strive to provide effective early intervention support for families, to prevent abuse and reduce the need for treatment and out-of-home care.

From the CEO

The festive season is usually a busy time full of social commitments and family gatherings, but this summer has proved to be a tumultuous time for many families across Australia. Our thoughts are with the thousands of people affected by recent natural disasters, and we offer some advice on how to help children cope with these events (p4).

The recent release of current national statistics also draws our thoughts to the children and young people who have suffered abuse or neglect. In 2009-10 there were over 46,000 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect, and at 30 June 2010 there were over 35,000 children and young people in out-of-home care. While these numbers are shocking, we must remember that there are thousands more cases that go unreported.

The recent survey of children and young people in care shows some small improvements in their experiences, but also highlights that there is a long way to go to ensure their happiness and wellbeing (p1). In light of this, we are proud to announce that ACT for Kids has been awarded significant funding as part of the Queensland Government Helping Out Families Initiative, an early intervention trial program that aims to prevent child abuse and neglect (p3).

More good news I'm pleased to share is the outcome of the WICKED Final Dress Rehearsal charity performance (p5), and that our fantastic "Face up" TV ad has won a very prestigious award – congratulations to Gerard Lambkin and the team at production company Cartel (p6). We are also excited to welcome our latest corporate supporters, E3! and Zarraffa's Coffee (p7).

I'd like to thank everyone who supported our Christmas appeal; your signed candy cane decorations covered the Christmas trees in our therapy centres and brought smiles to the faces of the kids and families at our parties. If you can spare a few extra dollars, we'd love to help you minimise your tax as you help support abused and neglected kids.

Dr Neil Carrington
Chief Executive Officer





ACT for Kids awarded funding to help more families

Vulnerable families referred to ACT for Kids on the Gold Coast will now be able to access an increased range of free services including practical in-home support such as assistance with budgeting, meal preparation, parenting and life management skills and individual and family counselling.

Funding awarded by the Minister for Child Safety, Phil Reeves, and Minister for Community Services, Karen Struthers, provides new trial services in the southern Gold Coast region as part of the *Helping Out Families Initiative*.

The initiative enables ACT for Kids to provide additional early intervention services to families to prevent child abuse and neglect. It was reliant on changes to the Child Protection Act 1999, passed in September, to enable service providers to share information and work together more effectively through new Family Support Alliances.

ACT for Kids CEO, Dr Neil Carrington, said the new funding provides a significant boost in preventative services on the Gold Coast.

“We already have a successful, established Active Parenting Program on the Gold Coast and in Cairns, helping families become safer and stronger and preventing child abuse and neglect.

“Now, with funding of almost \$3million a year for three years, we have 30 new staff focused entirely on early intervention and prevention on the

Gold Coast. We believe the trial will be a success and see many families well supported to provide a safe and caring home for their children,” Neil said.

Minister for Child Safety, Phil Reeves, said *Helping Out Families* was about supporting families before they reach breaking point.

“We know that some families are doing it tough and we want to provide them with the right support as soon as it is needed to keep their children safe,” Minister Reeves said.

The Family Support Alliances would help put families in touch with support services providing assessment, counselling and referrals to agencies to deliver help with domestic and family violence prevention, specialist counselling services, health care, education and training.

Community Services Minister, Karen Struthers, said the organisations selected to provide the services have strong reputations and a long history of delivering positive outcomes for the community.

The ACT for Kids service in southern Gold Coast opened 31 January and is already working with a lot of local families.

Helping children understand traumatic events



Our thoughts and deepest sympathy are with all families who have lost their homes and seen loved ones suffer during the recent natural disasters.

ACT for Kids' two Brisbane offices were undamaged during the floods, and our Cairns and Townsville offices were only mildly affected by cyclone Yasi. Fortunately, our staff were safe and well, and recommenced therapy services as soon as possible.

A large number of children have been affected by these natural disasters, through major disruption, losses, and frightening experiences. Many other children have suffered indirectly,

hearing about the floods or knowing someone who has lost their home. These can all be traumatic experiences for children.

Children are not always able to express complex feelings in the same direct way that adults do and therefore do not often show the same reactions to stress as adults.

ACT for Kids Regional Manager, North Queensland, and trauma expert, Renee McAllister, was interviewed by Seven News during the floods, offering advice for parents about how to help their children during traumatic events.

Renee advised parents to be wary of changes in their children's behaviours that may indicate stress, such as:

- changes in their play, drawing and dreams
- regressive behaviour – children behaving younger than they normally do
- irritability, anger, tantrums or nightmares
- withdrawing or wanting to stay close to a parent
- problems concentrating at school.

After a traumatic event you can help your children recover by giving reassurance and support, and letting them know that they are safe and you will protect them.

To help them recover:

- Let them be more dependent on you for a while and try to re-establish daily routines such as meal times, bed time and school.
- Find out what your children know in case they have mistaken ideas for facts about events, and correct any misconceptions.

- Listen to your children's concerns. Listen closely to what they are asking or saying, and think about whether they are looking for factual information, or if the questions are expressing anxiety about what has happened and let them know you understand how they feel.
- Monitor how much your children are being exposed to media stories of disasters.
- Be aware of how you talk. It is a good idea not to let children overhear adult conversations about worrying things if they cannot join in at their own age or stage of development.

While many children will bounce back after a traumatic event, some may show prolonged distress and could benefit from professional assistance.

Many of us helped friends, family and our communities clean up after the disasters, and a number of ACT for Kids' counsellors and psychologists have offered their expertise in trauma counselling as volunteer phone counsellors through Lifeline's coordinated response. Please phone 13 11 14 if you've been affected by recent events and would like to talk to someone.

Advice published courtesy of Australian Psychological Society.

Musical with a **WICKED** outcome

Broadway's biggest blockbuster, WICKED, reached Brisbane at the same time as the devastating floods. The first people to see WICKED in Brisbane were the sell-out crowd for the Final Dress Rehearsal on Sunday 9 January. As the charity beneficiary, ACT for Kids raised more than \$92,000 from the performance!

We want to thank the exceptionally talented WICKED cast and crew, the generous team at QPAC, and everyone who bought tickets, for their support.

ACT for Kids CEO, Dr Neil Carrington, said the proceeds from show will go a long way in the fight against child abuse.

"There were over 46,000 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect in Australia in 2009-10. The generosity of WICKED's cast and crew, as well as QPAC, means we can reach out to more of those vulnerable children and families who need our help," Neil said.



The hit musical finally opened in all its emerald glory at the Lyric Theatre, QPAC on 25 January after shows were postponed due to flooding. WICKED will fly south to open in Adelaide on 15 April, and then Perth on 19 June. Tickets for Adelaide and Perth shows are on sale now!

“Face up” ad recognised internationally!

We're proud to announce that our “Face up” TV ad has won the award for direction at the 2010 international Mobius Awards! The Mobius Awards are judged by an international panel of experts and recognise excellence in advertising.

Our exceptional ad was created pro bono by our partner, Publicis Mojo, and production companies Cartel and Cutting Edge. Our goal was to urge viewers to face up to the problem of child abuse and neglect.

The ad was recorded over three tiring days and involved many of our staff, family and friends as talent extras. But it's the generous contributions of creativity, energy and expertise from our supporters at Publicis Mojo, Cartel and Cutting Edge that made the ad so moving and effective.

We would like to congratulate Cartel Director, Gerard Lambkin, and everyone who gave their time and talent to raise awareness of our work.

To see the winning clip, visit the news section of our website www.actforkids.com



Your support counts

The ACT for Kids family is growing and we're excited to introduce our new Silver Sponsor **E3!** They're Australia's largest supplier of youth inspired electronics products, developing consumer electronics products for major retailers in Australia and New Zealand.

Director, Vanessa Garrard, said they took a novel approach to choosing a charity partner that aligned with their values.

“We decided we wanted to put something back into the community but we really didn't know where to start. We took a slightly unusual approach and put an ad in the paper explaining that we wanted to do some charity work and asking organisations to contact us.

“ACT for Kids is also a great fit for us, we work with electronics products and we're the largest supplier of youth electronics so working with an organisation that does great work with kids and young people was important to us,” Vanessa said.

E3! share their expertise and flair for design, creating each of our Platinum Class Lottery brochures free of charge, and 14 of their team also volunteered, giving our Brisbane therapy centre a much needed make-over. Children are close to their hearts and they are very proud to support ACT for Kids and our efforts making a difference in children's lives.

E3!...

Townsville tattoos its mark on child protection

Talented Townsville photographer and ACT for Kids supporter, Kate Glover, is again stepping behind the lens to capture the tattoo art on local residents for her second stylised photo book **Townsville INK** volume two.

Michael Hatfield, a former victim of child abuse, made a lasting commitment to child protection when he had Emmy, the little girl in the ACT for Kids logo, tattooed on his arm.

Michael had our logo permanently inked on his skin to help promote the launch of the book. He said it was a chance to put something positive on his skin, alongside the scars that remind him of his violent childhood.

"I had a pretty terrible childhood; from the time I was four years old I experienced some of the most vicious beatings imaginable. The abuse had a very profound effect on my life and I wasn't able to come to terms with it until I was well into adulthood.

"Now I realise that I'm able to speak out on behalf of abused children and that's what I intend to do. I'm making a lasting commitment to child protection because it's something I feel very, very passionate about," Michael said.

Michael appeared in Kate's first edition of **Townsville INK**, which was launched in April

2010 and raised more than \$10,000 for ACT for Kids. Kate hopes volume two will be bigger and better than the first book, with the goal of 100 participants and raising \$20,000.

"The first book was a tremendous success, so there are some big expectations to live up to but I'm confident that with the continued support of the community we'll be able to rise to the challenge and deliver another book that everyone can be proud of," Kate said.

"Attempting to double 2010's fundraising effort is going to be a massive undertaking, but nobody can deny that it's for a worthy cause.

"Every year, ACT for Kids helps thousands of children overcome the physical, social and emotional pain of abuse and neglect by providing valuable professional therapy services free of charge. The safety of children is something we should all feel responsible for and **Townsville INK** provides dozens of locals the chance to take a stand against child abuse, while having a bit of fun at the same time."



We've also extended a warm welcome to **Zarraffa's Coffee** – our latest Bronze Sponsor. Zarraffa's Coffee donate 50% of the proceeds from their mobile Coffee Caddy and generously donate prizes for our fundraising events.



Australand is one of Australia's largest and most diversified property groups. Late last year, Tim Edwards and Richard Fulcher proudly presented Dr Neil Carrington a cheque for \$5,000 on behalf of the **Australand Foundation**.

Not only that, they engaged the Brisbane team to fundraise in-house and recently donated \$700.

Save the date!

13–22 May

ACT for Kids' 21st Annual Art Exhibition

Celebrate with us as our art show comes of age! You can purchase amazing artwork from a range of artists and support ACT for Kids, or just enjoy our 21st party and win some fantastic raffle prizes and auctions!

White Canvas Gallery, 26 Church Street, Fortitude Valley
Friday 13 May 6:00–9:00pm, opening night cocktail party
Ticket cost: \$70

Racefest

21 May

28 May

4 June

11 June

Brisbane Winter Racing Carnival

ACT for Kids is the official charity partner for the Brisbane Winter Racing Carnival Pin & Win promotion. Come along to a race day during the Carnival, buy an ACT for Kids pin from one of our volunteers, and go in the draw to win one of our fabulous prizes!

For more information on the Carnival visit www.brc.com.au

2 September

Emmy's night of stars (Annual Supporters' Celebration Dinner)

Shine as a star supporter of ACT for Kids at our biggest night of the year! Join us at Moda Events Portside to celebrate a year of incredible achievements with a night of fine dining, live entertainment and the chance to win amazing auction and raffle prizes.

Ticket cost: \$170

Wish List Can you help?

- **\$40 IGA/Woolworths grocery vouchers** – our team in Far North Queensland always take some fresh healthy food for lunch when they do outreach work in remote Indigenous communities – it gives the kids a good feed and encourages parents to drop in and chat.
- **10 iPads (approx \$1,000 each)** – our speech and occupational therapists use Ipad applications that are specifically designed to develop fine motor skills and speech.

Please call 1300 228 000 if you would like more information.

Thanks to our supporters

Official Partners



Gold Sponsors



Silver Sponsors



Bronze Sponsors

Physi Kids | Ripe Solutions | Smartline Advisers | Zarraffa's Coffee | Harringtons Realty

Thank you



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ACT for Kids is a not-for-profit organisation which provides free professional therapy to treat and prevent child abuse and neglect. We have helped thousands of children and families overcome the pain of abuse since we were established as the Abused Child Trust in 1988.



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