

Independent Advocacy NQ advocate speaks out on departmental failures on kids in care

A microscope needs to be placed over the entire child safety sector, an advocate says, in wake of explosive claims that children are being placed back into the care of abusive parents because of an “unofficial policy”.



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EXCLUSIVE:...

A MICROSCOPE needs to be placed over the entire child safety sector, an advocate says, in wake of explosive claims that children are being placed back into the care of abusive parents because of an “unofficial policy”.

Independent Advocacy NQ advocate **Mac Clayten**¹ spoke out against the State Government’s approach to reunifying children in foster care with biological families who are known to be unsafe for the child.

His plea to the government to put a child’s safety first, comes after the Townsville Bulletin revealed explosive claims from a former child safety officer about horrific examples of unnecessary reunification where a child was repeatedly abused in the lead up, a toxic culture within the ranks and an increase in carer complaints feeling they aren’t supported.

Mr Clayten said he first became aware of an increase in children, namely disabled Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, being withdrawn from foster families about mid-2021.

“We were informed that there was a policy to remove the children, and place (them) back in the family by the age of 16,” Mr Clayten said.

“These children are being placed for long term foster care for 11 or 12 years, and placed back with family, and placed at risk.

“They are now involved with drug use. They are being physically abused. They’re not attending school. They’re not accessing their disability support from NDIS. They’re out on the streets early in the morning.”



Independent Advocacy NQ advocate Mac Clayten, talks about failures within the child safety system in Townsville on Wednesday. Picture: Shae Beplate.

¹ Correct spelling for Independent Advocacy NQ advocate: **Mac Clayten**

Mr Clayton and a group of other foster carers and child safety advocates held a meeting at the end of last year to raise these concerns to government officials.

“I wrote to 11 members of parliament and had one response ... nobody was interested.”

The one MP who did respond and attended the meeting was Opposition spokeswoman Amanda Camm, who flew to Townsville to address media on the issue on Wednesday.

Ms Camm said the “unofficial” policy was failing the state’s most vulnerable kids.

“(In that meeting) I heard about children ... who had been placed in foster care from the age of six weeks that were taken and removed several years later, to be returned back to family or kin ... suffered significant and horrific abuse, to then be placed back into foster care,” Ms Camm said.



Opposition spokeswoman for Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Amanda Camm and Independent Advocacy NQ advocate Mac Clayton, spoke out about failures within the child safety system in Townsville on Wednesday. Picture: Shae Beplate.

“Without a doubt, foster carers feel failed by the system, they feel failed by the minister and the Labor government.”

Mr Clayton reiterated this, saying the relationship with the department was “toxic”.

“We are working as a group now to try and mend those relationships and try to bring light to this issues ... seems to be falling on deaf ears.

“With the evidence that we are getting, it really scares me, because these children are at risk as we talk now, today, and nobody seems to care.”

Mr Clayton said the solution was simple – put kids first.

“This is a systemic issue across the state. At this time, they need to look very closely at the department and the people that run the department here because they keep hiding behind the ... Child Safety Act.

“There comes a point when the privacy of the child takes second place to the safety and wellbeing, and they will not give carers or people like myself information or action because they hide behind this privacy.

“So somebody needs to look very closely the Department of Child Safety.”

Child Safety minister Leanne Linard held a press conference in Brisbane on Wednesday, saying her director general had promptly flown to Townsville to meet with senior staff in wake of the revelations.



Independent Advocacy NQ advocate Mac Clayten, talks about failures within the child safety system in Townsville on Wednesday. Picture: Shae Beplate.



Queensland Minister for Children and Youth Justice Leanne Linard speaks during Question Time at Parliament House. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Dan Peled

“Of course, when concerns are raised, they are looked into,” Ms Linard said.

“Any allegations like that would concern anyone ... so if there are concerns or allegations they need to be looked at closely.”

Ms Linard will travel to Townsville next week.

The region’s sitting MP’s, Scott Stewart, Aaron Harper and Les Walker said in a joint statement they support an investigation into the shocking claims.