



My Journey

in
Care

Contents

01	So, you have just come into care...	2
02	What about my family?	6
03	School and stuff	8
04	Going to court	12
05	Living away from home	18
06	Need to talk	22
07	Moving on	26
08	Going home	29
09	Making it better for other kids	31
10	Contacts	32
	Charter of rights for a child in care	34

So, you have just come into care...

01

Why have I come into care?

You have come into care because things are not okay in your family home at the moment.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, usually called 'the department', believes that it is not safe for you to be at home right now and the Childrens Court has decided that you need to be living with someone else for a while.

Why can't I live at home?

Sometimes families have a hard time. This is not your fault.

You have the right to live in a place where you are safe, have food, clothes, a roof over your head and people looking after you.

You should not be scared or hurt or worried about what might happen to you at home.

There may be many reasons why you cannot live at home now and you can ask your Child Safety Officer, who is usually called a CSO, or a caseworker to explain these to you.

The main thing is that you are safe.

Where will I be living, and who will it be with?

You might be living with a carer or in a residential home.

A carer can be someone in your family, such as a grandparent, an aunt or even a family friend. The department will make sure these people are able to look after you.

You may be living with a carer who is someone you did not know before. This person has chosen to look after kids because they care about what happens to them. The department will make sure your carer can look after you and keep you safe.

You might be living in a residential home with other people your age, as well as some staff. These places are set up for teenagers. You might stay in the residential home for a short time (maybe a few weeks), or it may be longer.

Your Child Safety Officer will explain how things work where you are staying and provide reasons for this decision. If you do not agree with this decision, you can contact the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 1300 753 228 (free call) to have the decision reviewed.

Who is the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services and what do they do?

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services is part of the Queensland Government. The people who work for the department have the job of trying to keep kids safe – in their family homes and when they come into care.

You will have met some Child Safety Officers. They will be the people from the department who you see the most. Child Safety Officers work in a team. They have a manager and work in an office called a Child Safety Service Centre.

There are lots of other people you might meet who work for the department and other agencies the department works with. The department works with these agencies to give you and your family the best support they can, and to make sure you are safe.



hello

Who are some of the people I might meet?

People from the department and other agencies that you may meet include:

Foster or kinship carer – this is a person who offers to care for you when you cannot live at home. They may be from within your family or the general public. They are trained and the department will check on them regularly to make sure they are able to care for kids.

Child Safety Officer – this is a person who works for the department and has a responsibility to look out for you, and to see that your needs are being met. A Child Safety Officer will be your main caseworker in the department.

Child Safety Support Officer – this person also works for the department providing extra support to help parents look after their children. They will be supporting your Child Safety Officer to get things done for you.

Child Safety After Hours Service Centre – this is the department's 24-hour telephone service. You can contact the centre if there is an emergency or you need help during the hours that your service centre is closed. The free call number is 1800 177 135.

“Community visitors rule.”

Stephen – 15

Recognised Entity – these are people from the communities of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children who work with the department to make sure your cultural needs are remembered.

Queensland Family and Child Commission – this is an organisation that oversees the child protection system and promotes the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people. The Commission aims to make positive ‘big picture’ changes for children in the child protection system. They don’t work directly with children and young people at a one-on-one level. You can call the Commission on (07) 3900 6000.

Community Visitor – this person works for the Office of the Public Guardian. They will visit you while you are in care to make sure you are being listened to, help you with any issues and connect you to support services.

Office of the Public Guardian – this is an organisation that provides individual advocacy for children and young people in the child protection system. You can call the Office of the Public Guardian on 1800 661 533 (free call).

CREATE Foundation – this is a community agency that offers a wide range of programs and activities to connect and empower children and young people in out-of-home care. They also aim to make positive change in the out-of-home sector. CREATE Foundation can be reached on 1800 655 105 (free call).



What about my family?

02

Do my family know where I am?

Your family knows that the department has found you a safe place to stay. If you or someone else in your family has been hurt by someone in your home, the department may not tell your family where you are until they know that you will be safe.

If a decision is made not to tell your family where you are, your Child Safety Officer will talk to you about this and the reasons why.

If you do not agree with this decision, you can contact the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 1300 753 228 (free call) to have the decision reviewed.

How can I contact my family and friends?

You need to talk to your Child Safety Officer if you would like to contact your family and friends and they can organise this.

You have the right to keep in touch with your family and friends. Sometimes there may be reasons why you cannot see some people in your family, such as if they are a far away, in hospital, or if it could be unsafe for you.



If a decision is made about the type and frequency of contact that you have with your family and friends, your Child Safety Officer will talk to you about this and the reasons why.

If you do not agree with this decision, you can have the decision reviewed by contacting the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 1300 753 228 (free call).

What if I do not want to see anyone in my family?



You don't have to see someone in your family if you don't want to, but you need to tell your Child Safety Officer if this is the case. Your Child Safety Officer will talk with you about this, but they cannot force you to see anyone.

Are my parents in trouble?

The department is concerned about whether your parents have been able to look after you – that is why you have come into care. Your Child Safety Officer will be working with your parents on this.

Sometimes parents break the law when they are looking after their kids and the police might be involved. If the police are involved, your Child Safety Officer will let you know what they are doing.

It is very important that you remember that **you** are **not** in trouble!



“Be happy. Even though you can't live with your family, there are lots of good foster families.”
Jaymie

School and stuff

03

Will I still be able to go to school?

Yes. It is important that you keep going to school.

Can I go to the same school?

Wherever possible, the department will try to keep you at the same school, but sometimes, like if your carer lives a long way from your school, you may have to go to a new school.

“Stay at school
and then get
a job.”
Justin



Will anyone at my school be told about what has happened to me?

Your Child Safety Officer will talk to your school principal, who will talk to your class teacher and support people like the guidance officer, but it's nobody else's business.

Your Child Safety Officer will only share your information with people at school who need to know this to give you the best possible education.

If you have any concerns about your Child Safety Officer giving your information to anybody, you need to let them know what you are worried about.

It's up to you to decide who you want to talk to about what is happening in your life.

What is an Education Support Plan?

This is a plan is for you. An Education Support Plan looks at the things you want to achieve at school and the way that everyone can help you do this.

You have a right to go to school and get the best education possible.

To make an Education Support Plan, your carer, family (if this is okay), Child Safety Officer, and support staff from your school will get together to talk about your educational goals. These goals and ideas are written into your Education Support Plan.

"I want to go to uni. I want to be a park ranger."

Craig – 15

How do I get involved?

You need to be a part of making the Education Support Plan by going to the meetings at your school or by telling your Child Safety Officer, class teacher or support staff what you want to achieve at school.

Your Education Support Plan will be reviewed at least once a year, or when something major happens in your life.

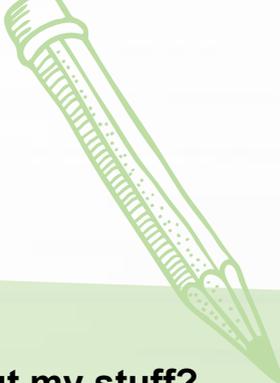
Ask your Child Safety Officer or teacher to explain more about the Education Support Plan to you.

Child Health Passport

Any child or young person who comes into care gets a Child Health Passport. This passport will be made up of information about your health and is used by your carer to meet your day to day health needs. Your Child Safety Officer will arrange for a health professional (for example, a doctor or dentist) to assess your health and decide whether any medical or dental treatment or follow up is needed. Your Child Safety Officer or carer will arrange for any health problems to be treated.

Information about your health will be written into the Child Health Passport. The passport will be given to your carer and if you move placements, it will move with you to make sure that your health needs continue to be met.

It will help you to know how to look after your health when you leave care too.



“Stay on your CSO’s back or they won’t do anything for you – I learnt the hard way! Keep trying and you will get what you want most of the time.”

David

What about my stuff?

If there are still some things at your family home that you would like to have, you will need to talk to your Child Safety Officer about trying to get them for you.

You will need to talk to your carer about how things are looked after in their home. Every household is different, but you should remember that your personal needs and privacy are important in whatever house you are living in.



Who will pay for the things I need?

Your carers receive some money from the department to pay for food, clothes and everyday things like your toothbrush and shampoo.

If you need money for extra things you should talk to your carer or Child Safety Officer. Sometimes they won’t be able to make the decision straight away and will have to check with their manager and will tell you when a decision is made.

You have a right to get the essential things you need at the right time.



Going to court

04

Why is the Childrens Court involved?

When the department thinks that it may not be safe for you to live at home, the Childrens Court will make the final decision about where you will live.

Your Child Safety Officer will apply to the court for a Child Protection Order, a legal document that gives the department the responsibility to look after you while you are not living at home.

Going to court gives everyone a chance to tell the magistrate their side of the story so the magistrate can make the right decision.

What happens at court?

Your Child Safety Officer will write something called an affidavit to give to the court. The affidavit is a legal document that tells the court the reasons why you are not able to live at home.

When in court, your Child Safety Officer or someone else from the department, will tell the magistrate why they think that it is not safe for you to live at home. If your parents are there, they can tell the magistrate what they think should happen to make sure you are safe.

There will be a lot of questions and talking and the magistrate will think very carefully about what everyone has said, so he or she can make a decision.

Sometimes it can take a long time for your story to be heard in the court. Your Child Safety Officer will tell you what is happening with the court and the important dates you need to know.

Do I need to go to court?

Children can attend court – especially if you are older and want to be involved in the process.

You should talk to your Child Safety Officer if you want to go to court. It may be possible for you to attend some of the court case.

Who will be there?

Each court case is different. There might only be your Child Safety Officer or a department court coordinator and the magistrate at court, but your parents have the right to go as well.

It might be important for other people to attend such as a support person or a separate representative, who is a lawyer just for you.

Your Child Safety Officer should be able to explain more about all of the people who go to court.



Do I need a lawyer?

Depending upon your age, you may also be able to be directly represented by a lawyer. To find out if this is possible, contact Legal Aid Queensland on 1300 651 188 (for the cost of a local call, however mobile phone rates apply if calling from a mobile phone).

Another place to contact for information about court is the Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC) on (07) 3356 1002.

The court may also decide whether to appoint a separate representative (a lawyer organised by Legal Aid Queensland) when you or your parents do not agree with the order the department is asking for.

This lawyer has the job of telling the magistrate your views and wishes, but they must also consider what is in your best interest based on all of the information.

“Ask for what you want ‘coz that is the best way to get it. Don’t let anyone put you down. Know what you want and go after it!”

Kelly



Will my parents be told what I have said about them?

Your Child Safety Officer will try to make sure that anything that you do not want your parents to know is kept private – but this is not always possible.

The magistrate will want to know what your opinions about the court application are. Your Child Safety Officer needs to give the magistrate any important information that will help the magistrate to make the right decision. If your Child Safety Officer thinks something you have said is one of these important things, they will have to tell the magistrate.

Your parents have the right to know what your Child Safety Officer is telling the magistrate, so they will hear this information as well.

Speak



What will the magistrate do?

The magistrate will decide whether or not to give the department an order which may be an Assessment Order, Temporary Custody Order or a Child Protection Order.

The magistrate will carefully explain why they have made this decision to the department and your parents, if they are there.

How will I find out about what happens in court if I am not there?

Your Child Safety Officer must talk to you as soon as possible about what happened at court, the decision the magistrate made and what this means for you. They must also provide you a copy of the order if one was given.

If there is a separate representative involved, or you have your own lawyer, you should ask to speak to them about the decision.

If you do not agree with the decision that the magistrate has made you can speak with your lawyer if you have one, or contact Legal Aid Queensland on 1300 651 188 (for the cost of a local call, however mobile phone rates apply if calling from a mobile phone), or the Youth Advocacy Centre on (07) 3356 1002.

Custody means...

Custody means that the person who is granted custody of you by the court has the right and responsibility to look after your daily needs and make decisions about these with you. For example, looking after you, providing food and clothes, and taking you to a doctor when you need.

Custody is a legal word from the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

What is guardianship?

The person who is granted guardianship of you by the court has the rights and responsibilities to meet your daily needs and make decisions about these. They can also make decisions about your long-term care and development in the same way that a parent could, such as being able to choose a new school for you.

If the department has guardianship of you, it also has custody, so will make decisions with you.

Guardianship is a legal word from the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

Living away from home

05

Do I have rights?

You do have rights. There is a Charter of Rights for all children in care and there is a copy of the charter in the back of this book.

The charter talks about your right to things like an education, and medical and dental treatment. It also says that other people must consider your privacy and that you are allowed to have a say in the decisions about your life – like where you are going to live.

You can talk to your Child Safety Officer, Community Visitor or CREATE Foundation about the charter and what it means for you.



What is a case plan?

The department must make a case plan with you that will meet your care and protection needs. This case plan is about goals for your life and all the things that people in your life need to do to make these goals happen.

Meeting these goals will be the responsibility of you, your family, the department and your carers.

Where does a case plan come from?

To work out how everyone can help to meet your case plan goals, your Child Safety Officer will organise something called a family group meeting.

Before this meeting your Child Safety Officer will talk to you and your family about what has happened at home and how things can be made safe for you.



Who is part of my case plan?

Your Child Safety Officer will invite people to your family group meeting who may be able to help with your case plan. These people include you, your family, your carers, people from school and other members of your family.

If you are from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island background, someone from a Recognised Entity will also be there to support you.

If you have a separate representative involved, or if you have your own lawyer, you can also invite them to the family group meeting.

Do I have to do this?

This case plan is about you. You can decide whether you want to go to the family group meeting by yourself or with a support person.

If you choose not to go, you can tell your Child Safety Officer everything that you would like said about your goals.



How does a case plan work?

You will get a copy of the case plan, with all of the things that everyone has agreed to do in it.

In six months time, you will have a case plan review with your Child Safety Officer and your family to see how things are going and make any changes that are needed.

If your carer has been made your guardian by a magistrate (you can talk with your Child Safety Officer to find this out) you have the right to ask the department to review your case plan at any time.

If the department makes a decision not to review your case plan when you ask, you can contact the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 1300 753 228 (free call) to have the decision reviewed.

Who makes decisions about what I can do?

This depends on what you want to do.

Your carers can make some every-day decisions with you. They can sign most permission slips from school, and decide things such as staying at a friend's house for a night.

Some decisions can only be made by your Child Safety Officer, your parents or your Child Safety Officer's manager. These people have to make the tough decisions, for example, letting you have an operation or giving you permission to do something where you could get hurt.

– “I regard my carers as my parents and I'm happy for them to make decisions.”
Craig

Need to talk

06

Can I contact my Child Safety Officer at any time?

You can contact your Child Safety Officer at their office during the working hours of 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Your Child Safety Officer may not always be able to take your call straight away, so leave them a message if they are not available. You can also speak with the team leader or manager if it is really important.

If there is something urgent that you need help with outside the department's working hours, you can contact the Child Safety After Hours Service Centre on their free call number **1800 177 135**.

*"Talk to someone
that you know
will make
you happy."*

Maria – 15

talking

Who else can I talk to?

It is important that you have someone you can talk to, ask questions and share your feelings with.

If you feel upset, worried or anxious about what has been happening in your life, please speak to someone about this.

Talk to your family, your carer, your Community Visitor, a support person or guidance counsellor at your school, or any other adult that you know and trust.

Remember, you have the right to feel safe. Find someone who will listen to you and will support you. You have a right to be heard.

“If you have a disagreement with someone, try and work it out by talking it over.”
Cynthia – 17

What about if I'm in trouble with the police?

If you are having trouble with the police, you should contact Legal Aid Queensland on **1300 651 188** (for the cost of a local call however mobile phone rates apply if calling from a mobile phone) or the Youth Advocacy Centre on **(07) 38571155**.

Legal Aid Queensland or the Youth Advocacy Centre will help with legal problems or let you know if there is another service that can give advice.

It is a good idea to get legal advice before talking to the police.

What do I do if my rights and needs are not being met in care?

If you have any problems while living in care, you should talk with your Child Safety Officer.

If your problem is about the care that is being provided where you are living, the department has a responsibility to look into this – so talk to your Child Safety Officer first.

If this does not fix or change things, then you have a number of options:

1. Talk to your Community Visitor about the problem. If the Community Visitor can't work out a solution with your Child Safety Officer and carer, they may decide to report the problem to the Office of the Public Guardian. The Public Guardian will then contact the department and ask them to report on what is being done about the issue. You can call the Office of the Public Guardian on **1800 661 533** (free call).
2. Contact the manager of your local Child Safety Service Centre or the department's Complaints and Review Unit on **1800 080 464** (free call).
3. Contact the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal which may be able to help you if the department has made a decision that you do not agree with regarding:
 - who you should live with
 - whether your parents should know where you are living
 - the amount of contact you should have with your family.

You have 28 days from the date of the decision to contact the Tribunal. You can contact the Tribunal on **1300 753 228** (free call).



How do I know what is on my files?

Young people who have come into the care of the department are often curious about what has happened to them and their family while they have been in care.

You have a right to access information about you. You can get this information from a few different places.

- To find out about your history and your family, the first place you should try is with your own family, if you can.
- Your Child Safety Officer can talk to you about your family history and about the information that is kept on your department file. They can sit down with you and work through the things that you would like to know about your life. Even if your Child Safety Officer has not been working with you for very long, they are able to help you find out about your history.
- You may be able to get your personal records through the Right to Information, Information Privacy and Screening unit in the department. You can contact Information Access and Amendment on **1800 809 078** (free call).



Moving on

07

What happens if I can't stay where I am?

There are a lot of reasons why you may need to move, including changes for you or your carer's family.

You need to let your Child Safety Officer know if things are changing for you. Your Child Safety Officer and carer will talk to you and your family about what is the best option for you if things are changing where you are.





What are my other options for places to live and when can I go into independent living?

The options available to you will depend on how old you are and any special needs you may have:

- **Kinship care** – Some children live with another person or family when they cannot be at home. This person might be a relative or someone that you know well, such as a family friend. The department calls this kinship care. If it's not possible for you to live with someone you know, the department may have found a carer for you.
- **Foster care** – Carers are people from the community who have special training and who are willing to care for any child that needs a home. They may care for children from different families, they may have children of their own or they may be a single person.
- **Residential care** – Some kids over 12 years of age may stay in a house with other people who are around the same age. Staff from non-government organisations will also live in these houses.
- **Independent living** – For some young people aged 16 years and over, it may be decided that you are able to live by yourself and have a worker come to visit you when needed.

The department may make a decision that where you are living is no longer safe or the best place for you, and want you to live somewhere else. If you do not agree with this decision, you can have the decision reviewed by contacting the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal on 1300 753 228 (free call).

When can I choose where I live?

As you get older, your Child Safety Officer will keep working with you to try and find the best living arrangements.

Your Child Safety Officer will be responsible for finding you a safe place to live until you turn 18, if your order lasts that long.

"I want to be able to become a singer and represent the community where I live"

Maria – 15

What happens when I turn 18?

From around the time you turn 15, your Child Safety Officer should start talking to you about what you are going to do when you turn 18. This is called 'transition from care' or 'transition to independence' by the department.

You will have to think about things such as where you are going to live, if you are going to study or go to work, money, and what other support is available for you.

Your Child Safety Officer will not stop talking to you as soon as you turn 18. However, they will do a lot of planning with you to help you to live your life independently.

Going home

08

Why am I going home now?

Going home will be a goal in your case plan that everyone has agreed to work towards. It will usually be discussed with you and your family for some time before it happens.

You will only be able to go home when the department and the court feels that things have changed and it is safe for you to be there.

You need to be part of the decision to go home. It is very important that you feel safe.

You may have visited or stayed at home for trial periods before you finally make the move home.

Sometimes, the decision for you to go home comes quite suddenly. This is more likely to happen if you have not been in care for long and a magistrate at court decides that your parents are able to keep you safe at home.



What if I do not want to go home?

You need to tell your Child Safety Officer if you do not want to go home. Your Child Safety Officer has to make sure that you have your say about going home.

If you have a different idea to your Child Safety Officer or your parents about going home, you can ask the court to get an independent lawyer to represent your views in any court hearing that will decide where you live. These people are called separate representatives.

Read Section 6 – Need to talk – for other ways you can take action to have a decision looked, at or to make a complaint.

Will the department still be around for me?

The role that your Child Safety Officer, and anyone else from the department will play in your life when you return home will depend on the reasons that you went home.

Sometimes, even when you are living back at home, the department may still be responsible for you for a while. During this time a Child Safety Officer will keep visiting you.

You can contact the department at any time if you feel unsafe or if things are not working out at home.

Can I still see my carer?

If you and your carer want to keep in touch after you go home, this will have to be talked over with your parents.

Wherever possible, arrangements can be made for you to keep in contact with your carer.



Making it better for other kids

09

How can my experiences make a difference to other kids?

The department is always working towards providing the best possible care for children and young people.

During your time in care and while you have been living away from home, you may have had the chance to be involved in group discussions or surveys about how your needs are being met and how things could be improved for you and other kids in care.

You may also want to get involved with the CREATE Foundation. CREATE can offer you training and opportunities to support other children and young people while you are still in care, and after you turn 18 or leave care.

By talking to your Child Safety Officer throughout your time in care, you will be making a difference. We can learn from all of the kids who are in care, including you.

*"I would like them
(all kids in care)
to know their rights!"*
Nina – 13

Contacts

10



For further information, contact:

CREATE Foundation

1800 655 105

www.create.org.au

Other contacts

Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

1800 811 810

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Child Safety After Hours Service Centre

1800 177 135

Child Safety Complaints and Review Unit

1800 080 464

Right to Information, Information Privacy and Screening

1800 809 078

Queensland Family and Child Commission

(07) 3900 6000

www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

Office of the Public Guardian

1800 661 533

www.publicguardian.qld.gov.au

Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal

1300 753 228

www.qcat.qld.gov.au

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800

www.kidshelp.com.au

Health Information Line

13 Health (13 43 25 84)

www.health.qld.gov.au

Legal Aid Queensland

1300 651 188

www.legalaid.qld.gov.au

Youth Advocacy Centre

(07) 3356 1002

www.yac.net.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services

1800 012 255

www.atsils.com.au

Charter of rights for a child in care

The *Child Protection Act 1999*, establishes the following rights for a child in care:

- (a) to be provided with a safe and stable living environment;
- (b) to be placed in care that best meets the child's needs and is most culturally appropriate;
- (c) to maintain relationships with the child's family and community;
- (d) to be consulted about, and to take part in making decisions affecting the child's life (having regard to the child's age or ability to understand), particularly decisions about where the child is living, contact with the child's family and the child's health and schooling;
- (e) to be given information about decisions and plans concerning the child's future and personal history, having regard to the child's age or ability to understand;
- (f) to privacy, including, for example, in relation to the child's personal information;

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- (g) if the child is under the long-term guardianship of the chief executive, to regular review of the child's care arrangements;
 - (h) to have access to dental, medical and therapeutic services, necessary to meet the child's needs;
 - (i) to have access to education appropriate to the child's age and development;
 - (j) to have access to job training opportunities and help in finding appropriate employment;
 - (k) to receive appropriate help with the transition from being a child in care to independence, including, for example, help about housing, access to income support and training and education.

For further information, contact:

CREATE Foundation

1800 655 105

www.create.org.au



Creating a better life for children and young people in care

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Government