



# President Report

## Year in Review 2022

**President:** Felicity Kime

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 - presented at AGM

### FISH Plan 2022

In February we met as a committee to review our previous FISH plan and create a new one for 2022-23. We identified key successes of the previous 12 months and drafted goals and a new plan for [2022-2023](#). Five key areas were identified by the FISH Committee to target our activities. This report covers our progress in each of the plan areas by various working parties made up of committee members or the peer support and advocacy team:

Governance	Individual and Group Advocacy	Community Advocacy	Systems Advocacy	Grants and Fundraising/Finances
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### Governance

Our focus on **committee membership** over the past 12 months has been to increase the number of people with lived experience. Several new candidates have been identified and interviewed by the president and a practitioner on the committee. We hope that we will welcome two new parents onto the committee in 2023 to share their expertise from their lived experience and guide FISH committee activities.

Collaboration with the Grants and Fundraising Working Party this year explored **opportunities for increasing income and donations**. FISH continues to operate with limited funds. Running expenses, such as production of materials, IT services, memberships and insurances all come out of the Committee budget and we need to raise revenue to cover those expenses in 2023. Rachel Evans has worked hard as Committee Treasurer to ensure that costs are anticipated and private donations have helped to meet ongoing costs. The Grants and Fundraising Working Party will continue to prioritise this focus for 2023.

The committee continues to provide executive oversight to the **Peer Support and Advocacy Service** through bi-monthly reporting at Committee meetings and monthly supervision with Lou Johnston, the Service Manager, by Colleen Mullins.

Through the support of two UoN Social Work Students, the Committee endorsed updated **policies**, including Confidentiality, Conflict of Interest, Decision Making, and Social Media policies. The committee is currently in the process of updating the Code of Conduct and Committee Membership policies which are due for review, ensuring all relevant organisational policies are current and relevant.

### Individual and Group Advocacy

This is the primary focus of the **Parent and Family Peer Support and Advocacy Service** as one part of FISH.



Some significant work was undertaken this year to build and sustain the service, especially following a difficult period of COVID lockdowns and minimal staff. Recognition is given to the hard work of Lou, Rachel and Felicity who kept the service running early in the year. Since the start of this year, **another four peer workers were recruited**. The

team is currently made up of a Service Manager and six casual Peer Workers. The service has been expanding this year since which is covered in a [separate service report](#).

We hosted a **Family BBQ Picnic** in November this year to invite new and old FISH members to come together in a social support opportunity. We would have liked more people there but it was great to see those who came. We have plans to host these on a regular basis throughout the year.

## Community Advocacy

FISH attended a number of community events during 2022. This helps us raise the profile of the organisation's work and contribute to important conversations about family inclusive practice in our sector and community.

Felicity Kime attended (virtually) a **Perth Conference – Australia and New Zealand Third Sector Research: 30 Years of ANZTSR Social Change Making**. She presented on behalf of FISH and discussed the recent partnership project with LWB hosting parent focus groups.

Felicity Kime, Jessica Cocks, and Kat Raisbeck attended the **AIFS conference** in Melbourne.

Felicity co-chaired a symposium with Dr Nicola Ross (UoN)

which called for system and practice change to improve family participation and create space for parents and families to lead. This was an opportunity to meet the director of AIFS who also promoted FISH across their social networks.



FISH parent leaders talked about their lived experiences with students in a **UoN Child Protection course** to raise awareness about the importance of family inclusion in child protection practice and for students to think about their future practice.

Stella Flick, a new FISH Committee member and former student social worker with our peer team, **established our new Instagram page**. We hope

to access a wider community of parents and families and spread information about FISH work.

**Hunter Homeless Connect Day** was held in August and a team of FISH parent leaders attended to share information about FISH and the Peer Support and Advocacy Service and to network with community partners. This was a great opportunity for our peer workers to connect with the sector as workers and professionals.

We ran our **workshop for workers and carers - Building Better Relationships** – twice this year (after a long period of not happening due to Covid). They had very low interest and attendance. We got very positive feedback from workers who attended. We will change our approach to getting participants.

EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS: "The learning format allowed us to explore complex issues deeply and to link this to practice and real-world applications"; "[To improve, I need] More effort to engage family in meetings, more input and include them in child's goals."

In October we ran **our first-ever Listening Campaign** which was coordinated by the Peer Support and Advocacy team. We drew together 12 senior managers from government and non-government agencies, 13 parents and peers with lived experience, and 9 FISH committee members and allies.



We heard stories from parents about their lived experience, reflected on what that meant for practice and identified opportunities for change. This event was a huge success and we are in the process of collating learnings from the day to feedback to participants to improve family inclusive practice and culture in our sector.

EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK FROM MANAGER PARTICIPANTS AT THE LISTENING CAMPAIGN: "powerful, ..... impacting"; "emphasises the need for us as practitioners to take a step back when we are working with parents and families and really include them"; "all our training and education is missing one thing, which is lived experience. This needs to be integrated into our practice ..... thinking bigger and broader about (systems change)"



FISH partnered with the **Reily Foundation, LWB and Child and Family Focus** (South Australia) to deliver a workshop in Adelaide to promote and plan parent and family peer advocacy and support child protection in SA.

### Systems Advocacy

Felicity Kime presented with the CEO of Families Australia in a **webinar for National Families Week in the Celebrating Families Speaker Series** (May 2022). This showcased diverse families and community leaders working to support families and support children to thrive. Felicity shared her lived experience related to the importance of family to her and her community.

Felicity was accepted onto the **National Coalition Steering Group for Families Australia** and will be the first representative with lived experience. Families Australia provides policy advice to the Federal Government and Parliament on ways to increase the wellbeing of children and families, especially those experiencing the greatest vulnerability and marginalisation. The opportunity for FISH and lived experience to be represented at this level is significant.

The **Parenting Research Centre (PRC)** approached FISH to be consultants on their **Client Voice Project**. Rachel Evans and Felicity Kime co-facilitated an online workshop in March. Two social work students on placement, Stella Flick and Sequoia Ellis, helped develop the workshop and provided support during the workshop. The focus was supporting the PRC to develop their approach to including client voice in their practice and projects through creating a guiding statement and associated principles.

The **PRC** also consulted some of our parent leaders/ peer workers about **trauma resources** that they developed for families in Victoria. We

received great feedback from PRC staff about the valuable contributions.

Colleen Mullins and Felicity Kime participated in the **DCJ Safety In Care Subcommittee** during the first half of 2022. They provided consultation and input into the redevelopment of the Alternative Assessment (used by DCJ in cases of allegations of abuse in care). They ensured that the voice of the family was included in this document. It is understood that this will now be implemented with a more comprehensive and responsive assessment.

FISH Parent Leaders/Peer Workers took part in the consultation process for **review of the DCJ Safety and Risk Assessment tools**. They gave unique insights as people who experienced the tool applied to their families in the past and provided suggestions to enhance its effectiveness and relevance to assessing safety and risk.

Rachel Evans and Lou Johnston provided consultation and feedback about **new DCJ family resources** for parents experiencing child protection intervention. They provided valuable insights about language and accessibility for parents experiencing trauma.

We have continued our membership of the **Hunter Community Alliance (HCA)**, participating in their recent Listening Campaign. All four of our social work student team members attended the **HCA two-day Community Organising Foundations Training**. Two of those students, Jess Parr and Kelli Shaunessy, also participated in the **HCA discernment assembly** with Lou Johnston, Jessica Cocks, and two new members of our peer support team, Beck Rayfield and Laura Kirby. Beck made a great contribution, talking to the assembly about homelessness.

FISH was approached to be part of planning a **research project** with the University of Newcastle and University of Queensland along with Micah Projects/FINSEQ and FINWA. The first step is a grant application. The plan is a mixed methods study on peer advocacy across parts of Australia. It is intended to be a participatory research project involving parents in different research roles, including co-researchers.

Jess Cocks and Shantelle Common are continuing with their **Department Social Services work around the National Framework**. They are focused particularly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,

parents and communities, and the need to ensure their voices are heard in the new Framework.

Jess Cocks and Lou Johnston wrote a response on behalf of FISH to the **DCJ Discussion Paper and Family Is Culture report**. They provided a detailed response to the recommendations made, ensuring that the voice of parents and the importance of family inclusive practice are emphasised in documents and recommendations.

### Grants and Fundraising:

In January this year, FISH announced a **significant grant from the Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation (ISNF)**. Their funding is for three years, dedicated to



wages for one full-time equivalent Peer Worker and three days per week for a Service Manager. This is critical funding which helped us establish and strengthen the Peer Support and Advocacy Service.

The service continues to be an under-resourced service within FISH, in terms of funding for resources, e.g., printing and catering for workshops, equipment for Peer Workers to do their job, promotional materials. The Committee identified a need for generating funds to be used towards **running costs for FISH generally** as well as the service. In October, **grant applications** were made to the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation (we made it to Stage 2, due in Jan 2023) and to the Community Development Fund (still awaiting feedback). Re-introducing worker and carer workshops should also generate more income.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been a very hard but amazing year for FISH. So many new amazing projects and so many things we have achieved for the first time ever. The dedication that has been shown this year is truly amazing and, in saying all this, I hope the work FISH has done this year continues to help families!!

*Felicity Kime*

FISH President & Peer Worker

9 December 2022