

Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce

2019 ANNUAL REPORT

13 December 2019

To the Minister for Child Safety, Youth and
Women and Minister for the Prevention of
Domestic and Family Violence



13 December 2019

The Honourable Di Farmer MP
Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
Locked Bag 3405
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Minister

I am pleased to present the 2019 annual report of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce (the Taskforce). This report fulfils the responsibility of the Taskforce under its Terms of Reference to provide an annual report to the Minister for Child Safety, Youth and Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

The Taskforce has been established for 12 months and as outlined in the attached report, has made progress in addressing priority areas of work, as identified by Taskforce members.

The nine members that make up the Taskforce are committed to ensuring that you continue to receive the best advice we can offer in the ongoing implementation of the reforms recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission).

The Taskforce has appreciated the amendments that have occurred to legislation, policy and practice over the last 12 months across the Queensland Government, as a direct outcome of the Royal Commission recommendations. The Taskforce remains committed to ensuring the voices of people with lived experience continues to be heard throughout the implementation and into the future.

On behalf of the Taskforce, I would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation and gratitude for your ongoing support and commitment. Should you wish to discuss the report or the work of the Taskforce further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Mr Robert (Bob) Atkinson AO APM
Chair
Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce

1. Background

The Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce (the Taskforce) was established by the Queensland Government on 3 September 2018. The role of the Taskforce is to provide for the views of those who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse, support services and organisations in advice to the Queensland Government on implementing the reforms arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission).

We also provide advice on a grants program for activities that contribute to truth, healing and reconciling histories.

Acknowledgments

The Taskforce acknowledges all that has come before and led us to where we are now.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as our First Nations and Traditional Owners of the land.

We acknowledge all people with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse.

We also acknowledge:

- the Stolen Generations
- the Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants whose experiences were recognised through the 1999 *Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions*, known as the Forde Inquiry
- people who as children in the care of the State of Queensland were inappropriately placed in adult mental health facilities
- people harmed in out-of-home care
- people affected by forced adoptions.

We recognise the harm experienced by many in the past and are committed to keeping this at the forefront of our work.

Vision and purpose

Our vision is for a Queensland where children are protected, safe and supported to reach their full potential.

Our purpose is to raise awareness of institutional child sexual abuse and its impacts, to drive changes that will protect children, and provide a holistic response to support, justice and healing for people with lived experience across Queensland.

Membership

Our Terms of Reference state that membership of the Taskforce will include:

- four representatives of people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse, including at least one representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and one representing people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse in an institutional setting other than residential or home-based care
- two representatives of services that support people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse
- one representative of care providers
- one representative of religious institutions and religious schools.

Taskforce members

Our Taskforce members are:

- Robert (Bob) Atkinson AO, APM - Chair
- Joan Isaacs
- Diane Carpenter
- Mike Wragge
- Mary E Adams
- Helena Holdaway
- Julie Pemberton
- Karyn Walsh
- David Baker

To find out more about our members go to page 13.

2. Priorities of the Taskforce

In late 2018, Taskforce members established our priorities for the year. These priority areas have been discussed at length in 2019 and include:



3. Taskforce meetings

How we work together is just as important to the Taskforce as the issues we tackle. We value the diversity of our members, and work together to achieve our common purpose - to make a difference for people with a lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse in the past, present and future.

We have held six formal Taskforce meetings in 2019 in February, April, June, July, August and November.

While there is no requirement for Taskforce members to work in between meetings, we aim to be responsive to opportunities to influence the implementation of Royal Commission related reforms.

One of our core principles is to involve one of our members with lived experience as much as we can in these opportunities.

What we heard in 2019

Throughout 2019, there have been four common themes that have clearly emerged from our meetings and our discussions with people with lived experience, services and other stakeholders.

These are:

- The work of the Royal Commission did not conclude with the Royal Commission. People with lived experience continue to need to be heard and believed, and the work towards justice and reconciliation is continuing.
- The challenges people are experiencing in making applications to the National Redress Scheme. The Taskforce acknowledges that these issues are being considered by the Commonwealth and Queensland Government.
- Access to support services by people with lived experience, their families, their supports, and for Forgotten Australians, increasing needs as they age. Next year, the Taskforce will make a submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- The important role of legislation and external reporting in keeping children safe. The Taskforce welcomed the Queensland Government's amendments to the Working With Children Checks and the introduction of new criminal offences of failure to report (that encompass religious confession) and failure to protect.

4. Highlights for 2019

Presentation at the National Child Protection conference in Brisbane

The first presentation of the Taskforce was at the National Child Protection Conference, hosted by PeakCare Queensland in Brisbane.

It was a unique opportunity for Taskforce chair, Bob Atkinson AO APM, to speak about his work as a Commissioner for the Royal Commission.

This set the scene for Taskforce members with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse, who presented the work of the Taskforce, in particular the key messages and priorities of the Taskforce.

Day at Cherbourg

In July 2019 the Taskforce was privileged to be invited to attend and speak to the former Boys and Girls of the Cherbourg dormitories and attend the opening of the new exhibition of the Cherbourg Boys Dormitory developed by the Ration Shed Museum Committee.

South West Child Protection Symposium

During Child Protection Week, our Chair was a keynote speaker at the Toowoomba University of Southern Queensland, South West Child Protection Symposium.

This conference was held in partnership between many government and non-government organisations in the region. A forum, hosted by the Taskforce, will be held in Toowoomba in early 2020.

Discussion on the learnings from Canada and Australia

The Taskforce hosted a forum during Child Protection Week at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane.

The purpose of the forum was to hear from Dr Marie Wilson, former Commissioner, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and Taskforce chair and former Commissioner of the Royal Commission, Bob Atkinson AO APM, on their learnings about institutional child abuse.

The event was attended by many government and non-government staff and people with lived experience, and provided many thought provoking questions to consider.

Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Grants Program 2019

Under advice from a Probity Advisor brought in by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW), the grants program was established in-house by DCSYW, including the development of the grants guidelines.

Taskforce members provided advice and feedback on the definition of truth, healing and reconciling histories to assist DCSYW in the guidelines development.

Additionally, the Secretariat of the Taskforce spent considerable time speaking to Forgotten Australians through Lotus Place asking for their guidance on defining reconciliation.

Two members of the Taskforce were Special Advisors to the grant assessment panel, however these two members did not have any scoring functions to their role.

5. Achievements

At the last Taskforce meeting of the year members reflected on the year that has been. Key achievements that were identified included:

- advocating with the Commonwealth for the placement of Royal Commission reports into libraries
- providing advice to the DCSYW on the operation of the National Redress Scheme in Queensland, particularly in relation to Direct Personal Responses and counselling and psychological care
- supporting the training of Queensland Government senior executives responsible for delivering Direct Personal Responses
- providing advice to the Minister in response to the Joint Select Committee on oversight of the implementation of redress related recommendations of the Royal Commission; *Getting the National Redress Scheme right: an overdue step towards justice*
- providing advice and feedback on the Queensland Government's sexual violence framework, *Prevent. Support. Believe. Queensland's Framework to address Sexual Violence*
- contributing to the design of the National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (recommendation 9.9), led by the Commonwealth
- receiving briefings on the proposed amendments to the *Child Protection Act 1999*
- receiving briefings from the Department of Justice and Attorney-General on Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2018 and Working With Children Checks

5. Achievements

- working on the development of a comprehensive state-wide mapping of support services for people with lived experiences and their families
- hosting the Honourable Leneen Forde at our August meeting and hearing her reflections on the Forde Inquiry and lessons she learnt
- attending a number of events including: the 20th anniversary of the delivery of the Forde Inquiry report to the Queensland Government, Remembrance Day, Songs of Justice Concert, Child Protection Practitioners Association of Queensland annual Leneen Forde address, the Healing Foundation National Redress Gathering in Cairns, lunch with the Minister to acknowledge the one year anniversary of the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse and an informal meeting with the Premier and Minister for Trade to discuss the recent amendments to the Civil Liability and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2018
- engaging with Queensland Government departments through the Queensland Redress Community of Practice, presentations with staff of the Department of Youth Justice and the Department of Health
- undertaking various stakeholder engagement with support services, government agencies and meeting with people with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse.

6. Contact with people with lived experience

As the year has progressed and awareness of the Taskforce has grown, people with lived experience have started contacting the Taskforce to discuss their experiences, concerns and issues. While the role of the Taskforce does not extend to advocating for individuals it is important that what we hear from people with lived experience as it contributes to the foundational understanding of our work.

It is our practice when we are contacted to ask people who on the Taskforce they would like to raise their issue with. People are welcome to contact us by phone, email or by writing a letter. Wherever possible we aim to engage with people how and where they feel comfortable.

The Taskforce is privileged to have this engagement and is committed to being a trusted ear and source of information.

7. In our own words

Taskforce members Joan, Mary, Mike and Diane share below their thoughts on the first 12 months of operation for the Taskforce and how they feel about being a member of the Taskforce.



Diane

I would like to acknowledge all Taskforce members for a successful year, and how I measure this success is in the progress we have made on decisions to improve keeping children safe. My views on the Taskforce set up, is that it should have been set up sooner rather than later. On a positive note it took our current government to see the need for a Taskforce to address Truth, Healing and Reconciliation.

Myself personally I feel that the Taskforce should be ongoing no matter what government is elected to govern, as sadly there will always be a need for change. I would like to say a thank you for the trust, the Honourable Di Farmer has given to myself as a Taskforce member. I would like to acknowledge the ongoing support the Secretariat and her team give to myself and the other members of the Taskforce.

For me it has been a productive year and as a person with lived experience, I would like to propose the Taskforce is ongoing for life. Thank you to all Taskforce members for a wonderful year and look forward to next year.



Mike

It's been positive to see some of the good work being done to implement the recommendations and to work alongside the other members of the Taskforce and seeing the changes occur. I feel extremely privileged to work alongside the members of the Taskforce and be able to contribute to the policies and procedures to improve the child protection system.



Mary

As our first year draws to a close, I believe, we, as a dedicated and respectful working team, have covered a lot of ground. In particular the responsibilities as outlined in our Terms of Reference, regarding the implementation by the Queensland Government of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

The advice we provide is in line with the feedback and experiences we hear from people with a lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse. We endeavour to provide our best advice to the Minister of Child Safety, Youth and Women and the Minister for Domestic and Family Violence Prevention, that reflects the experiences and thoughts of people in the community.

As a long-term advocate of people with lived experience and those who experienced abuse in an institution, I feel privileged to be a member of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce to continue to shed light on this issue. I see my role on the Taskforce as being one that brings to the surface the issues and transgressions and to right the wrongs of the past.

My goal is for these transgressions to be reflected on and ratified to assist those affected by past wrong doings. Most importantly I see my role on the Taskforce in helping to direct the way we as a nation care for our children today, who are an integral part of our future.



Joan

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge the fact that the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce even exists. The Palaszczuk Government has done what no other state government has done. The government in its wisdom has sought to include in its advice and decision making, not only members of Parliament and the general community, but those who have been personally affected by institutional child sexual abuse and their supports.

Secondly, I wish to say what an honour and a privilege it has been for me to be a member of this Taskforce. I think the Taskforce has had a very successful year. Many of the goals of the Taskforce laid down in November last year have seen great progress. For example, the Taskforce has set out to take the books of the Royal Commission to the people, and began doing that with our first community engagement in Cherbourg. I felt honoured to be there and to be received so graciously and openly by the Boys and Girls of the Cherbourg Dormitories. It was a vast learning experience for me as well. I have a new understanding of how our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered.

To see new laws being brought before Parliament has been a significant highlight for me. These are important outcomes of the Royal Commission and their recommendations. These laws, policy changes and practices address so many of the issues that have made children vulnerable in the past and have made it difficult for them to seek and attain justice later in life.

It has been great to have updates from different sections of the government's working areas, including Redress, Working With Children Checks, Sexual Violence Prevention Framework, Department of Justice and Attorney-General reforms, and to be able to provide input into their decision-making. The work involving the recommendations of the Royal Commission, which involve various sections of government and the Taskforce has been open and collaborative.

In 2020, I expect to see the work of the Taskforce already in progress to continue. In particular, I look forward to the legislative amendments made in 2019, being brought to fruition in 2020.

8. Schedule and priorities for 2020

The Taskforce has spent 2019 establishing itself and consolidating our work. Our priority for 2020 is to focus on increasing community awareness and getting out and talking to people about the work of the Royal Commission.



We will:

- host a forum for organisations and people with lived experience in Toowoomba
- commence a hearing the voices listening tour, where we travel as much as we can across the state to hear from people, communities and organisations
- deliver a presentation at the National Indigenous Youth Empowerment Summit in Cairns
- deliver the second 2020 round of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Grants Program
- distribute information to organisations and people with lived experience.

The Taskforce looks forward to working with the new Director-General of the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women in 2020 and continue to extend to the Minister a standing invitation to attend Taskforce meetings, as appropriate and subject to the Minister's schedule.

9. Our contact details

The Taskforce is supported by two staff from the DCSYW. The Taskforce can be contacted via Ms Pieta Sephton, Secretariat on 07 3097 7251 or Ms Kelly Lotz, Principal Advisor on 07 3097 5793 or Taskforce.Secretariat@csyw.qld.gov.au.

The Taskforce website can be accessed via the DCSYW website www.csyw.qld.gov.au/child-family/queensland-government-response-royal-commission-institutional-responses-child-sexual-abuse/truth-healing-reconciliation-taskforce.

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Taskforce Members

Robert (Bob) Atkinson AO, APM

Bob was the Commissioner of the Queensland Police Service for 12 years from 2000 until his retirement in October 2012. In a 44 year career with the Queensland Police Service, Bob served from Goondiwindi to Cairns.

Bob oversaw reforms after the Fitzgerald inquiry from 1990 as well as the Public Sector Management Commission Review and Report Recommendations of the Queensland Police Service in 1993.

Following his retirement from the Queensland Police Service, Bob was appointed as one of six Commissioners of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. In 2019, Bob's contribution to the Queensland community was recognised through a Queensland Great Award.



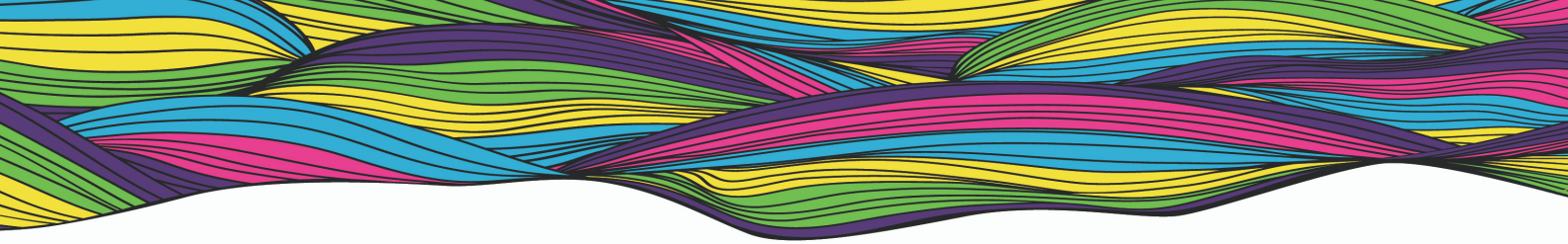
Joan Isaacs

Joan is a wife, mother and doting grandmother. At the age of 14 she was groomed and sexually abused by the chaplain at her school. Despite her abuse, Joan went on to be a teacher.

Silenced by her abuser and later by the Catholic Church through their Towards Healing program, Joan was finally able to speak in 2013 when she gave evidence at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In 2016, Joan released her book *To Prey and To Silence*, to expose the truth and to encourage others who have experienced similar challenges. In 2017, her book was a finalist in the Queensland Literary Awards – People's Choice.





Diane Carpenter

Diane is a proud Aboriginal woman, mother and grandmother from the Mitakoodi people, who lives in Brisbane with her husband and two blue cattle dogs. Diane grew up in St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol. Diane courageously provided evidence to the 1999 *Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Queensland Institutions* (the Forde Inquiry) and in 2004 to the Senate Inquiry into children in institutional care, later known as the Forgotten Australians Report.



Many years later in 2015, Diane again provided evidence to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse about her experiences in Neerkol.

On leaving Neerkol, Diane spent many years working as a nurse. Diane has coordinated a shelter for women experiencing domestic and family violence in Mornington Island and was a community health facilitator at the Townsville Migrant Resource Centre. Here she supported people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access mainstream health services. With the other community facilitators, one of her achievements at the Migrant Resource was the introduction of the interpreter's card.

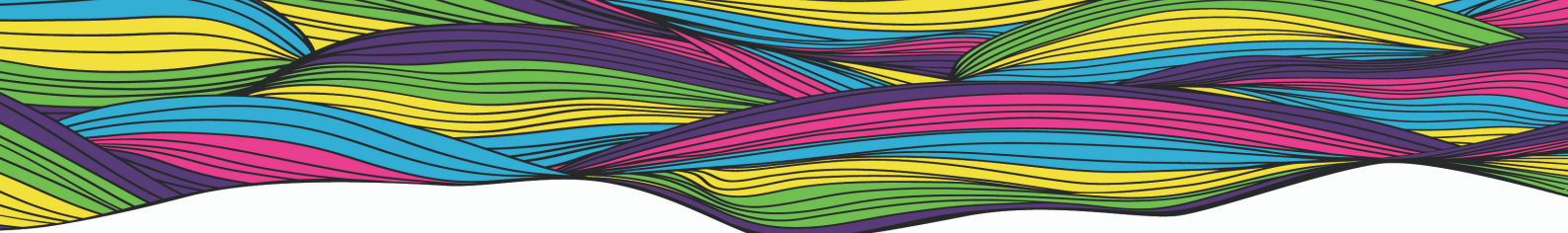
Mike Wragge

Mike is a proud Wakka South West Queensland man, born in Cherbourg Aboriginal community. Mike was institutionalised at the age of five and placed with his four brothers and one sister in the Cherbourg Boys home. Mike left the Cherbourg Boys Dormitory in 1973 and stayed with his mother and various other family members around South East and Western Queensland.



Mike began his working career in Cherbourg before moving to Brisbane in 1983 to take up a position as a community worker with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services. It was around this time that Mike started his affiliation with many of the Indigenous organisations and the Murri community in the Brisbane region.

Mike has had the opportunity and privilege to work closely with many good community workers, such as the Brisbane Council of Elders, which has given him great insight into their experiences and knowledge. Mike has been an active member of the Indigenous community in Brisbane since 1983. In 1988, Mike commenced work with the federal Department of Social Security which is now the Department of Human Services, where he is still employed.



Mary E Adams

Mary was a resident of Queensland institutions for over 16 years. Mary became a qualified Enrolled Nurse in 1972 prior to completing a number of post-graduate courses. Mary has spent time travelling overseas and working in third world countries as a nurse, nanny, English teacher and within a non-government organisation in the area of community services.



Mary has long been a strong advocate for people with lived experience of institutional abuse. In 1997, Mary held the role of Secretary and Treasurer of the Neerkol Action Group, the first support group established in Queensland to recognise the needs

of former residents of institutional care. In 1998, Mary advocated to the 1999 *Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions* (the Forde Inquiry) about issues that needed to be addressed for former residents. Following the Forde Inquiry, Mary was appointed by the Honourable Anna Bligh, the then Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services as a member of the Forde Monitoring Committee.

Mary has provided her personal account of living in St Joseph's Orphanage, Neerkol as evidence to the Forde Inquiry, the 2004 Senate Inquiry into children in institutional care, later known as the Forgotten Australians Report, and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

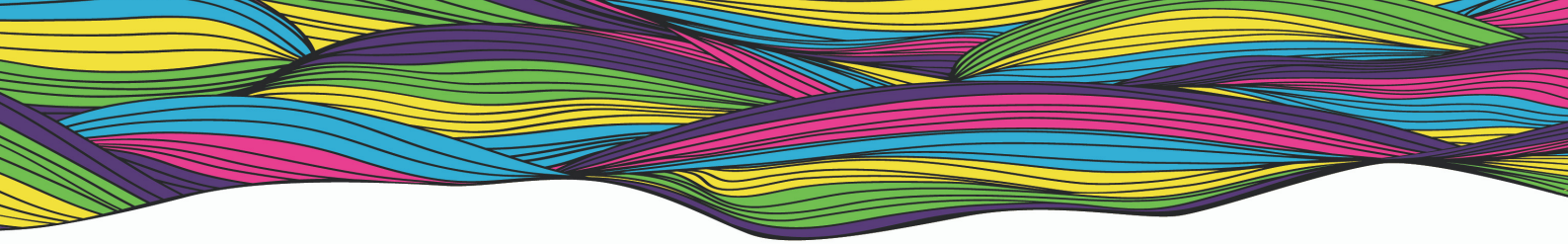
Helena Holdaway

Helena has more than 20 years of experience in the social and community services sector and has held a range of senior roles in Australian and UK not for profit organisations as well as government.



In her current role as the State Director for Queensland, Life Without Barriers, Helena has responsibility for a wide range of service provision, including services specific to children and young people in care

Helena is passionate about ensuring that children and young people that access services are well cared for, supported, protected from abuse and respected as they should be.



Julie Pemberton

Julie works as a Specialist Support Counsellor for Link-Up (Queensland) Aboriginal Corporation. Julie provides counselling and ongoing support for people applying to the National Redress Scheme.

Julie has specialised in areas such as trauma, addiction recovery and relationships including families and children and individuals. Julie's philosophy is to walk with someone while they are on their healing journey. Julie aims to be a co-traveller while providing a safe and secure environment while the person is discovering who they are.

Julie has worked as an educator in the adult education sector with Counselling, Youth and Community Services. As an educator, she advocates that the first step is for a learner to believe in themselves because once that happens anything is possible. Julie holds a Masters in Education (Counselling).

Karyn Walsh

Karyn Walsh is the Chief Executive Officer of Micah Projects, a not-for-profit organisation in Brisbane committed to social justice. Since the mid-1990s, Karyn has been supporting people with lived experience of institutional abuse.



Karyn has supported people through the 1999 *Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions* (the Forde Inquiry), Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiries including *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record – Report on child migration and Forgotten Australians* and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

For over 20 years Karyn has advocated alongside the Historical Abuse Network to recognise the needs of people with lived experience of institutional child abuse. Achievements include: the establishment of Lotus Place—the first peer support and resource centre with Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants; the 2007-2010 redress scheme; and the establishment of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce.

In 2016, Karyn was awarded a Doctor of Social Work and Nursing *honoris causa* by the University of Queensland. In 2017, Karyn was awarded a Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia.

David Baker

Since October 2014, David has held the position of Moderator of the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia. David has served in regional oversight roles in the Uniting Church, and as a congregational minister. Before being ordained in ministry in 1991, David was a property valuer for the Queensland Government.



David is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and holds a Bachelor of Theology from Brisbane College of Theology and a Diploma in Business Management from Queensland Agricultural College.

Under David's leadership, the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia set up an Interim Redress Scheme for survivors of institutional sexual misconduct, consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. David has also overseen improved training of Uniting Church in Australia congregations to ensure that ministry within the life of the church is safe for children.

David is the representative for religious institutions on the Taskforce.