

Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership

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Thriving Kids in Disasters SUMMARY REPORT





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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which we live and work, and their continuing connection to land and sea, kin, culture and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and to First Nations colleagues.

We are privileged to welcome and grow our children and support our families in these places.

We also acknowledge the First Nations leaders, advocates and organisations that have fought for children and their families, and the resulting consequences of adversity and trauma over generations.

We acknowledge the resilience, determination, leadership, generosity and innovation of First Nations peoples, and we recognise the value inherent in Indigenous ways of 'knowing, being and doing'.



Acknowledgement of Collaborators

Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership (TQKP) would like to acknowledge the contributions of young people, communities, collaborators and investment partners involved in the Thriving Kids in Disasters (TKiD) project. We give our thanks and appreciation for the time, knowledge and resources shared to bring together these important insights.







- Emerging Minds
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- Queensland Centre for Perinatal Infant Mental Health, Children's Health Queensland
- Queensland Police Service
- Queensland Fire and Emergency Service
- Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts – Community Recovery Branch
- Queensland Reconstruction Authority Get Ready Queensland
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Queensland Department of Education
- Head to Health Brisbane
- Southern Downs Regional Council
- Ipswich City Council
- Toowoomba Regional Council
- Adelaide Hills Council
- Lockhart River Aboriginal Shire Council
- Yarra Ranges Council
- Community Plus, Yeronga Community Centre
- Laidley Community Centre
- BUSHkids

- Centacare FNQ
- Red Cross Australia
- Outback Futures
- yourtown
- MacKillop Seasons
- Creative Recovery Network
- Headspace Capalaba, Wesley Mission Australia
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- Australian National University
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Overview

Why we need a focus on kids in disasters

What surrounds us and happens to us shapes us. In order to thrive, infants, children and young people need healthy developmental environments where their needs are met, their wellbeing is prioritised, and their resilience nurtured.

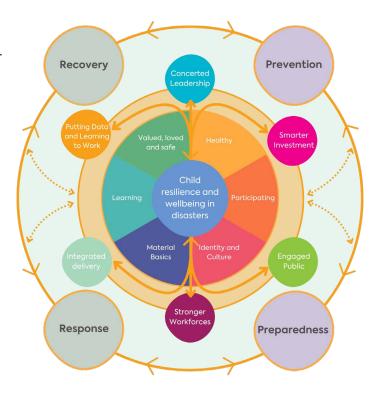
These developmental environments can be challenged by a range of factors, including climate change, related disasters and health and wellbeing issues. These events are increasing in frequency and severity and are compounded by an array of other issues impacting the abilities of individuals, families, communities, social and environmental systems to cope and adapt to changing circumstances.

Worldwide, kids are recognised as one of the population groups most affected by disaster events, with an estimated one billion at extreme risk of experiencing negative impacts. Current evidence shows that increased and cumulative exposure to adversity stemming from disaster experiences can undermine wellbeing and overwhelm the resilience of kids. Further, disaster related adversities can threaten the long-term health and wellbeing of kids across the lifespan, due to the disruption of nurturing development environments at critical stages of neurobiological development.

Disasters present a key threat to every child's right to life and development, making it essential that kids are recognised as distinct and unique stakeholders in disaster management (DM). In Queensland, this is especially pertinent, as our extreme disaster risk profile puts kids at considerably greater risk. Gearing our systems in Queensland to better recognise and support kids in disasters will require a range of systems level changes and investments, including those outlined in this report.

What is TKiD

Thriving Kids in Disasters (TKiD) is an initiative of the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership's (TQKP) Country Collaborative and The John Villiers Trust (JVT). TKiD has brought together stakeholders from a variety of sectors, organisations, and locations to join a collaborative coalition aimed at uplifting Queensland DM system capabilities to support Queensland kids. Together we have built an evidence base from existing literature, two discovery workshops, and 27 stakeholder interviews and discussions to understand how current DM arrangements support the resilience and wellbeing of infants, children, and young people; and the types of systems-level opportunities available to improve our current approach.



TKiD's conceptual framework

TKiD Framework

TQKP used two evidence-based frameworks to organise our findings:

- 1. Australia's child and youth wellbeing framework, ARACY's The Nest.
- 2. TQKP's <u>Six System Levers</u> outlined by the ANZSOG & Every Child joint project on Systems Leadership for Child and Youth Wellbeing.

The TQKP Systems Levers offer a framework for recommendations that foster adaptive, coordinated, and high functioning systems capable of supporting the resilience and wellbeing of kids.



TKiD Summary findings

What we've discovered

A review of the literature details the impacts of adverse childhood experiences, entrenched disadvantage and trauma on health, development, learning, behaviour, and relationships across the life-course including those related to disaster experiences. It is well understood that the significant disruptions caused by disasters threaten the resilience and wellbeing of infants, children, and young people in different ways. Their ability to prepare for and cope with disasters is influenced by age, stage of development, and other factors, and this needs to be better understood by caregivers and those involved in DM in Queensland.

We know that kids feel valued, safe, and loved in DM settings when:

- they can maintain a sense of calm, safety, agency and connection
- secure and functional family and community relationships exist
- the safety and care of significant adults in children's lives is supported
- specialised attention to their needs is provided across PPRR
- a holistic and integrated approach to their wellbeing is taken, involving local child-centred infrastructures and community-based organisations.

We know that **healthy** kids have their physical, mental, and emotional health needs met, and in DM settings:

- this is supported through a range of age-appropriate interventions from non-specialised, preventative community and school initiatives to specialist clinical services
- opportunities are provided for kids to come together with their peers following a disaster or community-level traumatic event to help them reconnect and share their experiences in a safe way.

Kids of all ages want to participate and be heard in matters that affect them, and in DM:

- such inclusion should be age appropriate and informed by developmental theory and kids themselves
- all levels of government and community can do better to engage with a greater diversity of kids and families, including young people aged 12-18 years, children of first responders, kids and families from First Nations and

culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and kids who live with or care for someone with a disability or chronic health condition

 systems must work together with kids and their families to acknowledge their unique circumstances, which can empower their autonomy and inclusion in the community.

Having a positive sense of identity and culture is central to the wellbeing of kids and in disaster contexts, this means that:

- DM operators understand that the nature of disasters and our DM approaches pose risks to secure attachment and identity, and to kids' connection to their family, community, culture, and environment
- kids' cultural and spiritual needs and contributions must be considered, respected, and provided for across PPRR
- opportunities must be taken to draw upon First Nations knowledge where family, community, culture, and country are seen as interconnected protective factors that shape kids' identity, wellbeing, and resilience, and are woven through everyday life.

Having appropriate material basics, such as safe accommodation, food, water, bedding, nappies, age-appropriate toys, transport, school supplies and spaces for play are crucial for kids and families, in and outside of disaster settings.

- In a disaster context, authorities and other helping agencies provide material basics to infants, children, and young people primarily through their families.
- Evidence suggests that families who are better prepared with longer term provisions of food and water experience less anxiety during disaster.
- The provision of material basics is a human and social recovery priority coordinated by local government in its response plans and the <u>Department of Treaty</u>, <u>Aboriginal</u> <u>and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships</u>, <u>Communities</u>, <u>and the Arts (DTATSIPCA)</u> in immediate relief/ early recovery plans.
- Fuel vouchers, furniture, (human and animal) food, clothing, books, and toys are often spontaneously donated and distributed locally following disasters.



Kids **learn** through a variety of experiences within the classroom, the home, and the community in which they live. These environments and the activities, technologies, and relationships available have a strong effect on their ability to learn and are often disrupted by disasters.

- Sharing timely and developmentally appropriate information about the hazards and risks they live with and the adversities they might have to face can help kids feel better prepared for and (along with the right supports at the right time) can help them recover from their experiences. This information is most effective, especially for young people, when it acknowledges their capabilities to solve problems and take action.
- Because of their leading role in kids' lives, libraries, early years centres, kindergartens and schools are pivotal in kids learning about disaster PPRR. These child-centred services are often managed by staff and volunteers who themselves are likely to be experiencing the many stresses associated with disasters and require supports.
- Return to usual routine can provide kids with a sense of familiarity and safety, but must be managed carefully, as many kids and parents experience hypervigilance and anxiety around disaster-related separation following a disaster.
- Child and youth-driven content and programming is an untapped opportunity to engage with kids' agency, and their diverse developmental, cultural, and linguistic learning styles and needs.

At the coalface of DM, there are common themes that provide an important context for any analysis and recommendations for systems-level changes. DM systems are currently grappling with the increased frequency and intensity of events – compounding, cascading, overlapping – stemming from climate change and resulting in systemic pressures. It is also clear that, despite the formal, centralised, and highly structured nature of DM, the particular context of disasters requires close attention, as the specifics of the event, timing, scale, impact, community, capacity, surrounding DM and political environments and resource availability challenge one-size-fits-all approaches.

In a resource-constrained environment, DM operators feel they are expected 'to do more with less', and so although the impacts of disasters compound other challenges and hardships, systems and operators are not always attuned to or designed to support people and locations in these situations. TKiD has found that although there are some good practice examples in Queensland, specialised infant, child, youth and family services and operators are not consistently involved in or invited to contribute to DM. This is often considered to be the case because while the resilience and wellbeing of kids and their families "comes up on occasion" it is not the core business or specialisation of DM.

- ingredient in achieving quality outcomes for kids, particularly in complex environments involving multiple agencies and levels of government like DM. We know that supporting the resilience and wellbeing of kids and their families across disaster PPRR requires prioritisation and focus, which will come from political support at all levels, clear governance, shared mission and language, and cross-sectoral collaboration. It requires long-term commitment from a wide range of stakeholders to mitigate the risks and harms of disasters and to act on opportunities to "build back better" using a contextually informed, locally led approach.
- Kids' resilience and wellbeing requires place based, flexible, long-term, smarter investment in a multifaceted service system to respond to the diverse needs and circumstances of kids and their families in DM and beyond. These systems should be informed by and add to a robust evidence base, incorporate universal, secondary, and tertiary supports, cultivate innovation, and produce value across sectors, time, and place. Investment should be well coordinated and come from a range of sources including government and philanthropic granting and community fundraising. Evidence shows that participatory granting suits locally led resilience building approaches to DM and is a way of prioritising and signalling where investment is needed the most.



- Reducing risks, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters is everyone's business and depends heavily on an engaged public. Sharing information, knowledge, decision-making, leadership, and action requires socially and culturally responsive relationship building and communication efforts by DM authorities and operators and a willingness from local people to share responsibility. Relationship building efforts by DM operators and agencies require respect for local leadership and knowledge and engagement with community members as genuine partners across PPRR. Evidence shows that kids are often invisible in the DM space and seen as dependents, rather than as distinct stakeholders. It is critical that this thinking shifts, and that kids from all age groups are engaged to contribute their perspectives, knowledge, and capabilities.
- Workforce development is critical to provide people in the DM setting with the right skills and supports to do their jobs well and protect their health and wellbeing. These supports ensure that professional and volunteer workforces are well prepared to support the infants, children, and young people they interact with. Workforce development that recognises the need for greater disaster resilience-orientation can connect fragmented actors and professions around the challenge of building resilient communities (people and places) and is particularly pertinent in DM. Where possible, it is important that infant, child and youth centred training activities are recognised by, promoted through, and incorporated into the Queensland DM system, including the **Queensland DM Training Framework** and Exercise Support Network.
- Integrated delivery in disasters is best achieved via well networked service sectors, DM agencies and communities. This includes the strengthening of interagency networks in place, relationships with temporary DM stakeholders and engagement with local community members. Approaches that harness community assets and relationships through prevention and preparedness activities support more effective and coordinated disaster response and recovery. These can be achieved through better coordination and resourcing of resilience building initiatives and greater prioritisation of the needs of specific groups of people in disasters, including kids.
- To put data and learning to work, opportunities to improve collection and use of information relevant to kids' needs in disasters must be identified and acted on. As a system there is a need to ensure that relevant data is collected and used to monitor and evaluate program efficacy and impact, and importantly, to improve service provision and outcomes achieved with kids and their families. It is critical that investment activities are driven by robust evidence, outcomes and shared measurement, which requires concerted leadership and trusting relationships to enable a collaborative approach to learning, acting, and measuring - creating a learning system underpinned by viable conditions for research. Greater investment in research that provides evidence of how DM programs support the resilience and wellbeing of infants, children, young people, and their families is needed and welcomed in Queensland and nationally.

Principles and Recommendations



These overarching principles are intended to underpin all recommendations.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made in line with The Nest domains and TQKP Systems Levers.



Practical examples of where this is or could be happening across the eco-system.

In Practice **Principles** 1. The resilience, wellbeing and rights of kids are This principle embeds Australia's obligations under the explicitly considered and holistically integrated into UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the legislation, policy, guidelines, and operational disaster right to survival and development. planning and management activities at all levels of 'Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must government and across organisations. make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.' (171) It aligns and supports the implementation of the UN's Sendai Framework guiding principle: 'Protection of persons and their assets while promoting and protecting all human rights, including the right to development.' (2) In practice this looks like: Local governments applying the child-friendly checklist in the current Australian Red Cross Queensland **Evacuation Centre Planning Toolkit into local evacuation** sub-plans and associated work instructions DTATSIPCA considering the resilience, wellbeing and rights of infants, children, young people, and their families in their annual review of their State Human and Social Functional Recovery Group Plan and District Human and Social Recovery Plans across the State QRA considering the resilience, wellbeing and rights of infants, children, young people and their families in their annual review and updates of the State and Local Recovery and Resilience Plans IGEM considering how the Standard for DM supports the resilience, wellbeing and rights of infants, children, young people, and their families NEMA working collaboratively to develop national standards for child-sensitive DM.

2. Infants, children, and young people are considered as unique stakeholders with distinct needs across their life stages. Their voices and perspectives are incorporated, and their agency and knowledge harnessed in developmentally appropriate ways across all phases of DM.

In practice this looks like

- Local government engaging with existing Council Youth Advisory Committees or other local youth groups in the implementation, review and improvement of local DM plans and programs
- State and national agencies engaging with existing youth fora in the implementation, review and improvement of state and national DM plans and programs
- Disaster Recovery and Resilience service providers engaging local young people to co-design and run programs following local bushfire, flood, cyclone, and other disaster events.

3. DM approaches and investments employ a childsensitivity lens, are long-term, place-based, appropriately timed, agile, multi-disciplinary and evidence informed, ensuring a 'do-no-harm' standard is applied that reflects children's rights.

In practice this looks like

- All Queensland Councils employing community recovery and resilience officers who engage in long-term work that promotes resilience and reduces vulnerability of community members, including kids and their families
- Councils partnering with researchers to monitor, evaluate, and learn from these activities, sharing findings through their discrete networks including Local Government Association of Queensland (<u>LGAQ</u>)
- Agencies and Councils working with local Neighbourhood and Community Centres in the planning and delivery of disaster risk reduction activities through existing and new programming, ensuring targeted engagement of high-risk locations and groups, including kids and families.



Nest Domains

The Nest provides a foundation for us to understand how we might foster resilience through supportive developmental environments for kids in disasters. These recommendations consider the needs of kids throughout the PPRR phases across six interconnected domains of wellbeing.

Nest Domain	Recommendations	In practice
Valued, Loved and Safe	 Co-design and implement child and youth friendly disaster communications across PPRR Support schools and early years centres to develop plans incorporating DM. Include reunification processes, return to routine plans, familiar faces, and peer connections Provide parents/care givers with increased access to evidence-based supports to cope with disaster impacts and better support kids Ensure that whenever it is relevant and feasible, evacuation centres include family areas to reduce exposure to toxic stress, and are resourced with safe breastfeeding and infant sleeping spaces, nappies, age-appropriate toys and spaces for play Expand supports that protect against increased domestic and family violence in response and recovery phases. 	Birdies Tree disaster resilience resources help children and families build emotional resilience to cope with and recover from disasters. Royal Far West provides a Kids Resilience Toolkit that helps kids and families develop emotional resilience. The Australian Red Cross Queensland Evacuation Centre Planning Toolkit provides clear and helpful advice regarding ways to incorporate the needs of infants, children, young people and families into evacuation centres. The National Gender Emergency Management Guidelines assist with the management of domestic family violence in disasters.
Healthy	 Include tailored age and needs based cohort planning across all DM phases. This could include infants, children and young people with complex medical issues/disabilities/chronic health conditions and developmental needs Resource and expand holistic and multidisciplinary initiatives that integrate physical and mental health, resilience and wellbeing approaches in education, early years and community settings during preparedness and recovery phases Resource the development of neuro and trauma informed approaches that build the capabilities and resilience of infants, children, young people, families, workforces, and communities in disasters. 	The Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit contains resources to help and support adults and children before, during and after a disaster or traumatic event. QUT and the Australian Education Foundation have produced National Guidelines for Trauma Aware Education
Participating	 9. Involve children and young people in all phases of DM, via developmentally appropriate opportunities to actively participate in family, school, community, environment, advocacy and policy activities, including climate action 10. Resource and amplify intergenerational, whole of community approaches to DM that leverage community assets and infrastructure and that invite in quieter community voices. 	Mental Health First Aid Australia offer Teen MHFA training. The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience provides a Disaster Resilience Education Handbook for Young People as guidance for those seeking to engage kids in disaster risk reduction learning and action. The Resilient Towns Initiative was a university-led, locally implemented initiative undertaken over 2021–23 that involved collaboration between researchers from the University of New South Wales and RMIT University, Red Cross, Anglicare and local and New South Wales governments. The initiative involved 7 towns and villages in the area and aimed to support these communities through youth-led resilience and recovery planning forums.

Identity and Culture

- 11. Implement prevention, preparedness and recovery activities that amplify and foster holistic connections to culture and place - such as environmental education and arts-based community development and place-making initiatives.
- **12.** Consider cultural responsiveness, gender identity, disability and neuro-diverse accessibility in program and initiative design.

The Fire to Flourish program has partnered with and funded Clarence Valley community leaders to run a program called Blicks Fishing Trip. This gives local kids directly impacted by fire and natural hazards a chance to connect through a multigenerational camp. Attendees learn living skills such as fishing and connecting with Aboriginal culture and history.

Queenslanders with a Disability Network co-host <u>Building Inclusive Disaster</u>
<u>Resilient Community</u> action planning sessions with Councils that lead to better inclusion of people living with disability and their carers – in Southern Downs, this includes a focus on kids.

Material Basics

- 13. Continue to address as a policy priority significant inequities and adversities experienced by many families to strengthen access to material basics before disaster strikes
- 14. Invest in locally available recovery supports such as service brokerage, free Kindy and childcare, aid with transport, and financial assistance with costs associated with housing, schooling, and long-term housing
- 15. Resource education, community, recreation, and transport infrastructure to foster 'return to normal' rapidly and 'build back better' approaches long term.

The Queensland Evacuation Centre
Planning Toolkit includes a checklist
that helps make evacuation centres
more responsive to the needs of infants,
children, young people and their families.

Neighbourhood and Community Centres like those in <u>Laidley</u> and <u>Rosewood</u> play an active role in disaster preparedness, response and recovery in their communities, including providing access to food, transport, and other material basics for kids and their families.

Learning

- **16.** Resource and expand evidence-based programs that promote disaster awareness and self-efficacy for children and young people
- 17. Embed action-oriented DM education that involves kids in real world problem solving across curriculum and that leans into First Nations cultural and traditional environmental knowledge.

Students from the Harkaway Primary School created a Manifesto that educates kids about bushfires. This is a part of a broader Schools in Fire Country program, managed by Natural Hazards Research Australia.

The Red Cross Pillowcase workshops help children prepare for, cope with and respond to an emergency.

Helping Hands is an ABC Kids disaster resilience curriculum planning tool kit for early childhood educators to help young children and their families prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters.

Systems Levers

The Six Systems Levers provide us with a framework to consider how we might best gear our systems to support the resilience and wellbeing of kids in disasters. These recommendations relate to strategies that cultivate adaptive, coordinated and high functioning systems capable of meeting the wellbeing needs of kids in disasters.

Systems Lever	Recommendations	In practice
Concerted Leadership	 18. Involve child, family and youth practitioners, educators, and leaders in local and district DM planning 19. Amplify flexible and responsive DM partnership models that incorporate smaller place-based organisations, networks, and groups 20. Undertake interagency multidisciplinary sector capacity and capability building activities during prevention, preparedness, and recovery phases to better support community informed, coordinated and streamlined responses 21. Advocate for national principles and standards for child-sensitive PPRR. 	Ensure child, family and youth practitioners, educators and leaders are included in Local Government DM groups and/or sub-groups. Whenever possible, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and Arts uses DRFA (Cat A and C) funds to engage and resource local child, youth, and family centred organisations to deliver recovery and resilience services and initiatives.
Smarter Investment	22. Explore and build upon community fundraising and philanthropic contributions to test emerging innovations to supporting kids in disaster contexts23. Implement community fundraising efforts that extend beyond the response phase of disasters.	Apply learnings from the Monash Sustainable Development Institute Fire to Flourish program that partners with and provides participatory granting to local communities for child and youth centred disaster resilience and recovery activities.
Engaged Public	 24. Involve kids, families, and communities directly in the commissioning and co-design of place based, culturally informed DM supports 25. Streamline and simplify systems where possible to remove access and navigation barriers for kids, families and communities seeking DM support 26. Provide public access to evidence based materials relevant to kids in disasters via key public facing portals, like the <i>Get Ready</i> website and app 27. Build skills and awareness for kids, families and communities to recognise and respond to signs of trauma in others via appropriate neuro and trauma informed training and shared language. 	Involve local child and youth mental health specialists alongside of DM staff at Emergency Services and Get Ready Qld days. Prioritise co-designed and co-produced child and youth initiatives in disaster recovery plans at the local level (e.g. through the work of Community Recovery and Resilience Officers).
Stronger Workforces	 28. DM and child, youth, and family agencies partner to build first responder and DM administrator capabilities in supporting kids, families, and caregivers in disasters 29. DM and child, youth, and family agencies partner to build capability of child, youth and family practitioners and educators to engage in PPRR phases of DM 30. Develop, test, and implement child and youth centred and family focused resources for all stakeholders engaged in DM. 	Develop, test and implement an integrated neuro and trauma informed learning and development toolkit for DM practitioners in Qld, such as TQKP's Childhood Builders suite and the Harvard Resilience Scale. Implement a Community of Practice to amplify current best practice and share valuable resources and approaches amongst practitioners. Sponsor local sector participation in the Mackillop Seasons Stormbird companion training.

Integrated Delivery

- 31. Amplify systemic responses that reduce competition and leverage the assets of communities, place-based organisations, disaster agencies, industry, and philanthropies
- **32.** Resource interdisciplinary, interagency DM groups across PPRR to build cross sectoral child health, development, wellbeing, and resilience expertise
- 33. Provide additional funding to schools and other organisations such as family hubs, neighbourhood centres, early childhood education and care services, schools, local libraries, sport and recreation clubs, and placebased initiatives through augmenting and leveraging existing programs (such as the First Five Forever program) to engage in DM
- **34.** Resource and maintain comprehensive service, resource, and government directories-to promote higher levels of coordination and integration across disaster phases.

Build relationships between the local DM and human services systems including shared training and awareness outside of times of disaster

 This includes shared training and induction to LDMG arrangements to enable quick 'stand up' capabilities when a disaster occurs.

Provide recovery funds to NCCs to deliver child- and youth-centred resilience building initiatives suited to the local context.

Putting Data & Learning to Work

- **35.** Ensure DM data collection and sharing processes are well resourced and coordinated to enable planning, design, and delivery of support for kids and families across PPRR
- 36. Develop and implement practices and methods that support agencies to make sense of the data available and generate new data sets to inform DM practices
- 37. Evaluate data related to current investments that target infants, children, and young people to identify promising practices, program improvements, redundancies, and missed opportunities (service gaps)
- 38. Invest in Queensland based research that generates and translates evidence about the incidence, impacts and implications of kids' disaster experiences.

Ensure Local Human and Social Recovery sub-groups have arrangements in place to share data collected by various agencies in disaster response and recovery to:

- identify impacts on infants, children, young people, and their families
- use knowledge of impacts to identify and create tailored, multi-agency responses.

Fund developmental evaluations of promising child and youth centred recovery and resilience initiatives and share learnings through practice guides and other relevant resources.



Connect with us

Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership

Thriving Kids Hub, Level 1, Mosaic Building 826 Ann Street, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006

TQKP@aracy.org.au

www.tqkp.org.au

linkedin.com/company/thriving-queensland-kids-partnership



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