

# Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Indigenous Children

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Funded by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) for the Australian Council for Children and Parenting



**Australian Government**

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**Australian Institute of Family Studies**

# Acknowledgements

- λ Acknowledge traditional owners of the land
- λ A two-stage, collaborative project with FaCSIA on behalf of ACCAP (funding) and SNAICC (research partner for Stage 2)
- λ Acknowledge the work of my colleagues on this project:
  - υ Leah Bromfield, Nick Richardson, Marlene Burchill - Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) ) [PHASE 1]
  - υ Jenny Higgins - AIFS ) [PHASE 2]
  - υ Nikki Butler - Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) [PHASE 2]
- λ Thanks to the participants



# How the research project came about

The Australian Council for Children and Parenting (ACCAP) wanted a solution-focused project that provided guidance to professionals in the sector as to:

- What works for Indigenous children in out-of-home care and their carers
- What helped overcome barriers to effective practice
- Examples of ‘promising practices’



# Context

- λ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in out-of-home care
  - υ Indigenous children comprise 3.6% of the total population of Australian children
  - υ Indigenous children comprise 22% of the OOHC population
- λ There are insufficient culturally appropriate placements available for Indigenous children



# Aim

- λ To identify barriers and promising solutions to the:
  - υ Recruitment
  - υ Assessment
  - υ Training
  - υ Support and
  - υ Retention
- λ of Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children and young people



# Method: Phase 1

- λ Literature review
- λ Interviews and focus groups with:
  - υ Professionals (National)
    - λ State and territory departments
    - λ Indigenous specific community-based agencies
    - λ Non-Indigenous community-based agencies
  - υ Indigenous carers (WA&QLD)
  - υ Carers of Indigenous children (WA&QLD)
  - υ Indigenous young people in care (WA&QLD)



# Recruitment

- λ Insufficient number of carers
- λ Difficulty in recruiting for some groups of children (eg disability, juvenile justice, short-term, no kin)



At one stage there it was great, you know, you'd say "we're looking for carers you know, who have you got?" They'd say "We'll get back to you, no worries". So that used you to happen, but it's not now ... I think people have realised now that the type of kids that we do place are just really high maintenance.

INDIGENOUS AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE

# Recruitment

- λ Past government policies and practices (both barrier and strength)
- λ Material disadvantage
- λ Mismatch between traditional child rearing practices and out-of-home care system
- λ Commitment to community (strength)



[Indigenous] people want to make sure that [Indigenous] kids are kept with their community. So they try and help out. It's our culture to keep our kids with us, so people volunteer.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

# Assessment

- λ Cultural appropriateness of assessment techniques
  - υ Communication style
  - υ Culturally sensitive issues (eg being a victim of violence)
  - υ Higher rates of numeracy and literacy problems
  - υ Importance of consulting with potential carers' community as part of assessment



Families display some embarrassment when asked to fill out forms for assessment and some do not proceed with the application when they become aware of the detailed information required.

DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE

It can take several visits over a period of months to draw out the required information. If it isn't handled properly, some families decide that the process is too invasive or involved and we only get half way through before they discontinue.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

# Assessment

- λ Cultural appropriateness of requirements
  - υ Traditional child-rearing practices
  - υ Anglo conceptions of attachment and bonding
  - υ Police checks
  - υ Physical environment (eg number of bedrooms)
  - υ Potential benefits of kinship care



There are some things you can't get past. If there are sexual offences, or extensive drug trafficking offences - these are things you can't get past.

Many of our [Indigenous] people have histories-and I am talking about past histories-that are offences [Indigenous] people will get picked up for because they are [Indigenous] ... because they have had a couple of [drinks] ... And so it's being able to work with the department to filter through some of that.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

We had three children in foster care – young children. They were with a non-Aboriginal foster carer ... these children would cry all night. They couldn't sleep. During the day, the foster carer inevitably found them curled up in the single lounge chair sleeping together ... And so we asked the birth family about this and these children had never been parted. They slept in one bed. And so the foster carer put three beds in the same room and they slept beautifully. It was about acknowledging that these children had different needs.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

# Training

- λ Training related to carers' beliefs about the type and quality of support provided
- λ When carers are adequately prepared, they feel supported
- λ In particular, carers wanted training about how to work with the child protection department in their state/territory



If you're going to recruit people in, you need to let them know what to expect ... I need to understand their point of view, their legalities, their guidelines. I haven't had anything that tells me what I can and can't do. It's a lack of information.

INDIGENOUS CARER

# Training

λ Non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children wanted training in Indigenous culture



CARER 1:

Do we worry about Westernising the [Indigenous] children?

CARER 2:

As least she'll get both sides of the world

CARER 1:

But she won't if she stays with me

CARER 3:

That's why it's vital to have cultural training

# Training

- λ Indigenous carers may also need cultural training



Even [Indigenous] foster carers need cultural sensitivity training because they can be a bit short about practices outside their connected community ...

Many foster parents have been foster children and lost their culture because they may have been fostered by non-[Indigenous] foster parents, so we need to help them reconnect with their culture and give them that strength that makes them stronger in doing the role of foster carer.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

# Support

- λ Carers told us the best way to support them was to provide services to meet the needs of children



The child's caseworker left Friday, they didn't even say goodbye to me, let alone the child.

NON-INDIGENOUS FOSTER CARE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE

Counselling? It's a joke, when their mum passed away it took two and a half years!

INDIGENOUS CARER

We have problems with the school. There's not enough support. I've never met the education worker ...

INDIGENOUS CARERt

# Support

- λ In addition, carers talked about the need for:
  - υ Adequate and timely financial support
  - υ Respectful relationships with the department
  - υ Practical and emotional support



You shouldn't feel like you're begging.

INDIGENOUS CARER

When I ring up [the Department], they're ducking and hiding for cover. You get one school shirt – and it's white! There's not enough practical and material support.

INDIGENOUS CARER

Young middle class kids coming in and telling our families what to do. They carry their own baggage, morals and standards.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

Foster parents are part of the team and you have to respect that. Be respectful, friendly, negotiate, ring them when they need you, when they're in crisis don't leave them hanging.

NON-INDIGENOUS CARER

# Retention

- λ Participants consistently told us that for Indigenous carers, recruitment not retention was the problem
- λ Once Indigenous people start caring few drop out
- λ However, carers are an ageing demographic and are having to stop for health reasons
- λ Carers may be temporarily unavailable for cultural reasons



We don't often have carers dropping out except for their own health.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

We are heavily reliant on middle-aged and older women ...  
The worry is that there won't be younger carers coming on board.

PEAK BODY COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES REPRESENTATIVE

It might be for family reasons, because they are staying out bush for a while or due to sorry business.

DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVE

# Overarching themes

- λ Interlinked nature of key issues
- λ Children with complex and special needs - most children in care have complex or special needs
- λ Differentiating kinship and foster care was not useful for Indigenous Australians
  - υ most carers are kith or kin to children
  - υ Many caring for multiple children and have dual roles: kinship and foster carer



# Promising practices

- λ Throughout, we identified many barriers for Indigenous carers
- λ We also identified many promising strategies to overcome these barriers ...



# Recruitment

We set up a community day at the local football club and worked with volunteers to set up a BBQ ... karaoke, face painting ... We had other service providers – non-Aboriginal providers there. We also had the Aboriginal health service there. We use it as a great promotional tool ... “Are you interested in becoming a foster carer?” When you see ... children having a fabulous time ... realise how important they are in our community ... it’s a really good recruitment tool.

AICCA REPRESENTATIVE

# Tips for recruiting Indigenous carers

- λ Programs that provide comprehensive support to carers attract others to become carers
- λ Recruitment is best conducted by Indigenous people through Indigenous organisations
- λ Use community events to promote foster care and to recruit potential carers
- λ Formal recruitment sessions work best when they include Indigenous speakers to talk about their experiences



# Assessment

In instances where a family was not approved, the AICCA was informed of the reasons this was the case. This enabled the AICCA to work with the family to make changes to pass requirements or even negotiate with the department to make concessions regarding particular requirements. This reflected a particularly strong understanding and partnership between the AICCA and the department.

AICCA AND DEPARTMENTAL REPRESENTATIVES

# Training

I always wanted to be a carer. I thought I had a lot more to give. We had to do a couple of weekends of training. Then had self-assessments, home visits, and police checks. It took about six months. I'm glad we did all that training because it opened our eyes ... They told you bad case scenarios and talked about how the department works, which is a major issue. We also did role plays.

NON-INDIGENOUS CARER

# Support

The support for our carers is really intense. We have an open phone line, which they can phone after-hours. Our worker does regular visits with them and sees how they're going. We involve the caseworkers who are handling the children and liaise with them around the children. Our worker and the caseworkers (from the statutory mob) do visits together ...

Family support workers also look after children, as well as the biological family ...

INDIGENOUS DEPARTMENT WORKER

# Phase 2: Profile of Promising Practices

- λ In the first phase of the project, we identified sites that had developed and implemented “promising practices” in the recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers.
- λ In the second phase of the project we revisited these sites and gather detailed information about promising programs and services
- λ Phase 2 conducted in collaboration with SNAICC



# Who did we talk to?

- λ Promising programs and services were identified from previous research and consultation
- λ Interviews and focus groups with chief executive officers, program managers and case workers from 13 sites across Australia to identify:
  - λ Strengths and limitations of the program
  - λ The elements that made the program successful
  - λ The steps taken to get the program up and running
  - λ Barriers encountered along the way



# The research findings

- λ We identified the key characteristics of promising out-of-home care programs (booklet 1)
- λ The profiles of 11 programs and services are sorted into booklets on specific topics (booklets 2-4)
- λ The profiles give information about:
  - Steps taken to get the program up and running
  - Why the program works well
  - How the program addresses client needs
  - Some have “how to” models of practice for specific issues



# The booklets

## λ **Booklet 1:**

Characteristics of promising Indigenous out-of-home care programs and services

## λ **Booklet 2:**

Assessing, training and recruiting Indigenous carers

## λ **Booklet 3:**

Comprehensive support for Indigenous carers and young people

## λ **Booklet 4:**

Indigenous responses to child protection issues



# Examples of promising practices

- λ Promising practices covered issues such as:
  - υ Community-based recruitment strategies
  - υ Indigenous-specific assessment tools
  - υ Culturally relevant training for carers
  - υ Community/family input into decision making (family group conferencing)
  - υ Services for Indigenous children with complex needs



# Booklet 2: Assessing, training and recruiting carers - programs profiled

- λ **Step by Step** - Aboriginal assessment tool (Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies, NSW)
- λ **Yarning about Kids with Yorganop Carers** - Indigenous-specific training for general and kinship carers (Yorganop, WA)
- λ **Growing Up Our Kids Safe and Strong** - Indigenous-specific training and assessment for kinship carers (Department of Community Development, WA)



# *Step by Step* Aboriginal assessment tool

- λ The *Step by Step* Aboriginal assessment tool was developed by the Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies in collaboration with the Department of Community Services' Aboriginal Services Branch in Sydney, NSW
- λ The Aboriginal assessment tool was modified from a mainstream *Step by Step* assessment tool
- λ The Aboriginal assessment tool was developed through extensive, ongoing consultations with Aboriginal communities



# *Step by Step* Aboriginal assessment tool

Carers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children all need the same four general competencies:

- ∪ Personal readiness to care
- ∪ Capacity and willingness to be a team player
- ∪ Capacity and willingness to promote the child's positive development
- ∪ The ability to keep the child safe



# *Step by Step* Aboriginal assessment tool

Carers of Indigenous children also need to be assessed for *additional* competencies:

- v Active participation in Indigenous communities
- v An understanding of Aboriginal kinship systems and the impact of past welfare practices
- v Knowledge of services for Aboriginal children and young people



# *Step by Step* Aboriginal assessment tool

λ *Step by Step* uses a culturally sensitive approach to assessment by:

- υ Taking time to build trust
- υ Using story telling rather than direct questions
- υ Not asking questions if the information is elsewhere
- υ Using community knowledge about the potential carer/family



It's about moving away from lists and lists of questions that were very intrusive... You might have to spend longer with a person before you start, but once the process starts you're doing the same thing, collecting data through conversations.

Louise Mulroney  
*Step by Step*



# *Yarning about Kids with Yorganop carers -* Indigenous-specific training

- λ Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation is located in Perth, WA and provides a range of services to carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- λ Yorganop's *Yarning about Kids with Yorganop Carers* is a culturally appropriate assessment and training program for carers of Indigenous children
- λ Carers complete 10 training modules and receive ongoing support from Yorganop after training is completed



# *Yarning about Kids with Yorganop carers -* Indigenous-specific training

## λ Yorganop delivers training using:

- υ A shared learning environment
- υ Experienced carers who share knowledge and skills
- υ Flexibility in training content and schedules - driven by carer needs
- υ Trust and building ongoing relationships with carers
- υ Accredited training opportunities



We've got some really experienced carers who can sit around the room and share their experiences with the newer carers. The training is often about people sharing their problems and difficulties.

We've built up a relationship with carers over a number of years. And because we've actually built that strong relationship with carers, they're also willing to go the extra yard for us.

Dawn Wallam

*Yarning about Kids with Yorganop Carers*



# Booklet 3: Comprehensive support for carers/young people - programs profiled

- λ **Aboriginal Carers Network** - Carer support groups (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, NSW)
- λ **IFACSS** - Comprehensive support service for kinship and general carers (Indigenous Family and Child Support Service, Qld)
- λ **Keeping Kids Connected** – Short-term emergency placements with non-Indigenous carers (Aboriginal Family Support Services, SA)
- λ **Panyappi** – Mentoring service for Indigenous young people (Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, SA)
- λ **Marungbai** – Leaving and after care service for Indigenous young people (Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Services, NSW)



# The *Aboriginal Carers Network* - support groups for carers

- λ The *Aboriginal Carers Network* is an initiative of the NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat's (AbSec) Carer Support Service
- λ AbSec's Carer Support Service supports carers through advocacy, facilitates training and provides carers with knowledge and skills, particularly in relation to dealing with child protection departments
- λ The *Aboriginal Carers Network* is a collection of carer groups that have formed throughout metropolitan, regional and rural NSW



# The *Aboriginal Carers Network* - support groups for carers

- λ *The Aboriginal Carers Network* provides:
  - υ Advocacy in dealing with child protection departments
  - υ Needs-based, responsive support
  - υ Knowledge sharing and skill building through group participation
  - υ Empowerment of carers through unity, e.g. group meetings and community events



We advocate for [carers] in a manner that allows them to take control of their own issues and to gain the confidence to know that they have the capacity to do that.

[The department doesn't] say no to carers any more. If [a carer] makes a phone call to the department they answer it, because they're not just answering to one person, they're answering to 20 or 30 people. That's what we stress in the support groups. You're a powerful, powerful lobby group. You've got to acknowledge that and understand that. You're not alone. But you are together. And together you can be very powerful, very strong."

Terry Donnelly  
*Aboriginal Carers Network*



# *Panyappi* - mentoring service for Indigenous young people

- λ *Panyappi* is an intensive, culturally appropriate mentoring program for Indigenous young people and their families
- λ The young people have been, or are at risk of becoming, involved in the juvenile justice system
- λ *Panyappi* provides an intensive mentoring service for Aboriginal young people
- λ *Panyappi* develops collaborative relationships with other stakeholders to collectively address the young person's issues



# *Panyappi* - mentoring service for Indigenous young people

*Panyappi* supports young people by:

- Reconnecting or maintaining connections between young people and their families, communities and culture
- Taking a family-inclusive approach to resolving issues and supporting the young person
- Building confidence, competence, identity and self-esteem
- Being responsive to the young person's needs



Mentoring has been part of Aboriginal culture for many years. It's like looking back at our roots. Looking at what the Elders did in the old days.

Doing the family tree gives [the young person] their spirit back... And that makes a difference, the identity and belonging.

Lisa Kambouris  
*Panyappi*



# Booklet 4: Indigenous responses to child protection issues - programs profiled

- λ **Safe Families** – Family inclusive approach to addressing child protection issues, (Tangentyere Council, NT)
- λ **RAATSICC** - Remote community response to child protection issues, (Remote area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care, Qld)
- λ **Lakidjeka** – Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Vic)



# *Safe Families* - Indigenous child protection response

- λ *Safe Families* takes an Indigenous, family-inclusive and community-centred approach to responding to child protection issues by raising community awareness
- λ *Safe Families* draws upon effective frameworks of care that currently exist within Indigenous families, communities and culture
- λ *Safe Families* aims to enhance outcomes for young people as well as strengthening families' capacity to provide care



# *Safe Families* - Indigenous child protection response

*Safe Families* supports children and their families by:

- Being community and family inclusive
- Advocating an Indigenous perspective on child protection issues
- Explaining child protection issues to families
- Building collaborative relationships with child protection services and other agencies
- Ensuring children are culturally safe, as well as physically and emotionally safe



We're always negotiating with the department as to how they see risk and how we see risk.

It's about the community being able to involve itself in statutory work. If a child comes into care they don't necessarily have to leave their community... If your extended family doesn't have the capacity [to care for the child] it doesn't mean the community doesn't have the capacity. You need a belief in the community's capacity.

John Adams  
*Safe Families*



# Concluding thoughts

- λ Participants agreed that ensuring the safety of children in out-of-home care is paramount
- λ Ensuring the safety of children in out-of-home care is important for *all* children - Indigenous and non-Indigenous



# More information on this presentation

For information on the common characteristics of organisations profiled in this presentation go to:

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs)

[www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)

and access:

- λ Higgins, J. R. & Butler, N. (2007). *Characteristics of Promising Indigenous Out-of-Home Care Programs and Services*. 'Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People, No. 1'.



# More information on the profiles

For more information on the programs and services profiled in this presentation go to either:

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs)

OR:

[www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)

and access:

- λ Higgins, J. R. & Butler, N. (2007). *Assessing, Training and Recruiting Indigenous Carers*. 'Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People, No. 2'.

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# More information on the profiles

- λ Higgins, J. R. & Butler, N. (2007). *Comprehensive Support for Carers and Young People*. 'Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People, No. 3'.
- λ Higgins, J. R. & Butler, N. (2007). *Indigenous Responses to Child Protection Issues*. 'Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People, No. 4'.



# Workshops

SNAICC and AIFS have also prepared a workshop based on the research findings for Indigenous professionals in out-of-home care. For more information go to:

[www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)

and access:

λ Butler, N. & Higgins, J.R. (2007) *Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers and Children: A Workshop for Professionals.*



# Background information on the issues

For background information on the barriers and facilitators to promising practices go to:

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs)

The following 7 papers summarise Phase 1 of the research:

- λ Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R., Higgins, D.J. & Richardson, N. (2007). *Why is There a Shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers?*
- λ Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R., Higgins, D.J. & Richardson, N. (2007) *Barriers, Incentives and Strategies to Enhance Recruitment of Indigenous Carers.*

...cont'd



# Background information on the issues

- λ Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R., Richardson, N. & Higgins, D.J. (2007). *Why Standard Assessment Processes are Culturally Inappropriate*.
- λ Richardson, N., Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R. & Higgins, D.J. (2007). *Training Carers*.
- λ Higgins, D.J., Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R. & Richardson, N. (2007). *Supporting Carers*.
- λ Higgins, D.J., Bromfield, L.M., Higgins, J.R. & Richardson, N. (2007). *Children with Complex Needs*.
- λ Higgins, J.R., Higgins, D.J., Bromfield, L.M. & Richardson, N. (2007). *Voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in Care*.



# Reports from this project

For reports from this project go to:

[www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/reports.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/reports.html)

and access:

- λ Richardson, N. et al. (2005) *The Recruitment, Retention and Support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers: A Literature Review.*
- λ Higgins, D.J., Bromfield, L.M., & Richardson, N. (2005). *Enhancing Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People.*



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