

Recruiting, assessing, training and supporting carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

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



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Acknowledgements

- λ Acknowledge traditional owners of land
- λ This project was conducted by
 - υ Dr Jenny Higgins -Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)
 - υ Nikki Butler -Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
- λ With thanks to the participants



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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



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Who did we talk to?

- λ Promising programs and services were identified from previous research and consultation
- λ We conducted interviews and focus groups with chief executive officers, program managers and case workers across Australia. We visited thirteen sites. Eleven programs were profiled.



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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



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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



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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)



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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



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Step by Step Aboriginal assessment tool

Carers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children all need the same 4 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



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Step by Step Aboriginal assessment tool

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

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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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Comprehensive support for carers and 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)



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The *Aboriginal Carers Network* - support groups for carers

- λ The *Aboriginal Carers Network* is an initiative of the 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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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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



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Indigenous responses to child protection issues - programs profiled

- λ **Safe Families** – Family inclusive approach to addressing child protection issues, (Tangentyere Shire 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
- 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



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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



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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



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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



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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/2005/reports/empirical/empirical.html

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'.



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More information on the profiles

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

www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/2005/reports/empirical/empirical.html

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'.



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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

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.*



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Background information on the issues

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

www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/2005/reports/empirical/empirical.html

and access:

- 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.*

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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*.



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Reports from this project

For reports from this project go to:

www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/2005/reports/empirical/empirical.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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