

## 6. OPTIONS FOR DISSEMINATION

There are seven different groups to which all or part of the findings from this research may be disseminated. Table 1 is a dissemination matrix that describes the key audiences for the findings from this research, the types of materials that would be disseminated to each group and the mode of delivery (oral or written). The matrix was developed to reflect the needs of the different audiences in terms of the amount and types of content that would be of relevance to each group.

This research was conducted with a significant proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and aimed to lead to improvements in the cultural appropriateness of out-of-home care placements for Indigenous young people. Given the Indigenous focus of this research, it is important that the findings from this research be disseminated in a culturally appropriate and accessible mode. For this reason the matrix presented in Table 1 includes a description of the preferred mode of delivery (written or oral). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a strong oral tradition, thus oral rather than written dissemination for Indigenous groups would be more culturally appropriate. Several options for oral dissemination of the research findings are discussed below Table 1.

In the dissemination matrix some groups have the qualification (selected) in relation to the material proposed to be disseminated to these groups. This is to highlight that not all of the material emerging from the report will be relevant to every audience. For example, training for non-Indigenous carers caring for Indigenous children will be of particular interest to non-Indigenous carers, but not to Indigenous carers. Similarly, it was considered that not all groups would need (or want) access to all of the findings described in the full report.

Three different types of publications are described within the dissemination matrix in Table 1. These are the full report, and the summary papers, which outline the specific themes and promising practice resource sheets. The full report can be disseminated as is, or the findings summarised for oral dissemination. The existing material can also be developed into several different themed papers by the research team. Several different options for the development of resource sheets describing promising practice are described below Table 1.

The three different publication types described in the distribution matrix are proposed in order to maximise take up of the research findings. There is a risk that the research findings will not be accessed if they are accessible only in format of the full report. Failure to disseminate the findings in a culturally appropriate and accessible manner may also have ethical implications.

Were this report not to be disseminated, it would go against recommendations coming out of the Indigenous communities and described in guides to ethical research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities published by the NHMRC (2003) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2000). These guidelines recommend that the following past practices not be repeated: the conducting of research “on” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the failure to provide feedback to participants.

The carers, young people in care and service providers in this study approached the research with enthusiasm and a willingness to engage with the researchers because of assurances that the research would be solution focused and culturally respectful. Participants were also willing to be part of the research because the intent of developing findings was so that they could be reported back to the communities to improve welfare responses to the next generation of Indigenous young people.

Finally, (but by no means least importantly) the findings from this research describe a solution focused approach to many of the challenges in providing culturally appropriate placements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and as such may have a positive impact on service delivery were they effectively disseminated to the relevant stakeholders identified.

**Table 1. Distribution matrix**

	Whole Report		Summary papers on specific theme		Promising Practice Resource sheets	
	Written	Oral	Written	Oral	Written	Oral
Policy makers (federal and state/territory ministers and bureaucrats)	✓		✓		✓	
Child and family welfare service managers, researchers and policy officers (mainstream)	✓		✓ (selected)		✓ (selected)	
Non-Indigenous practitioners (caseworkers, placement support workers)			✓ (selected)		✓ (selected)	
Indigenous agencies & peaks (including AICCA's)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indigenous carers				✓ (selected)		✓ (selected)
Non-Indigenous carers			✓ (selected)		✓ (selected)	
Researchers	✓ (conferences)	✓ (conferences)	✓ (journals)	✓ (conferences)		

## **Options for developing materials describing examples of promising practice**

The aim of this project was to investigate the issues surrounding the recruitment, retention, assessment, training and support of Indigenous home-based carers and to outline some promising practice developments in response to the findings. The general trends were described in terms of suggested solutions to identified problems. Participants described many challenges that need to be overcome in order to improve service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and their carers. For almost every challenge presented, there was a promising solution (either in practice or suggested) to assist in alleviating the identified problem. Given the depth of information available from the 80 consultations and focus groups, it is not possible to present every suggested solution or example of promising practice. Nor is this report the most appropriate form in which to present this information.

Given the valuable information obtained during the interviews and focus groups, it would appear to be a waste of resources (and not respectful of the goodwill of participants who gave of their time and embraced the approach of this investigation) not to undertake the further work necessary to disseminate this information. There are a number of options for disseminating “promising practice solutions” identified within this research project.

*1. Resource sheets that list a particular challenge and showcase the various different strategies or suggested options described within the interviews that were attempting to address this problem using the available data.*

There are several limitations with this approach:

- there is insufficient information in the interviews to describe the strategy in sufficient detail to enable replication;
- participants have been guaranteed confidentiality so it would not be possible (without going back and requesting their consent) to publish contact details so that those interested in the strategy or program can find out more about it; and
- the study methodology relies on participants’ perceptions, thus the promising practice examples and suggested options are not able to be objectively evaluated and there is no way of determining from the data available whether or not these suggestions do have promise for improving service delivery.

*2. Resource sheets that list a particular challenge and describe in detail the suggested solutions (identified within the interviews), and measure those solutions against “good practice criteria.”*

This process would involve going back to participants who described examples of promising practice and asking them to describe the strategy or program in greater detail.

These strategies or programs could then be measured against “good practice criteria” identified from the literature and experts in the field. For an example of this approach see the Newsletter of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault “Special Good Practice Edition” *ACCSA Aware no.7* (2005).  
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/pubsmenu.html>

The advantages of this second approach would be:

- greater detail about promising practice, thus increasing the likelihood of replication;
- the potential for contact details to be provided to enable those wishing to replicate strategies or programs to discuss this further with the program providers; and
- an objective criteria for evaluating the apparent merit of the strategies or programs described.

This suggested dissemination strategy is also culturally appropriate because it involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples developing solutions to problems faced by their communities. Furthermore, this strategy feeds back the knowledge gained from research conducted with the community, assists the Indigenous community with writing up examples of promising practice, and shares promising practices and programs throughout Australia. The limitations of this approach are that they would require additional project funding and time for dissemination.

Such a publication could highlight specific projects or practices that have been identified in the research as a “success factor” or an example of promising practice. An example of the format that this could take is the *Early Learning* reports, which were commissioned by the Telstra Foundation and produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Community development projects funded by the Telstra Foundation were evaluated (see [www.aifs.gov.au/nch/whatsnew.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/whatsnew.html)). In 2004, we produced Volume 1 (looking at two themes: supporting children and families; and early childhood literacy; see [www.telstrafoundation.com](http://www.telstrafoundation.com)). This year, we produced Volume 2 (looking at Indigenous community development projects under three themes: children’s health, culture and wellbeing; youth leadership and participation; and involving schools in the change process for communities). These are both highly readable reports, which adopt a narrative approach in describing the projects’ aims, key activities, outcomes and achievements, barriers and obstacles, and the key “learnings” that emerged along the way.

### *3. Using existing networks to distribute the final report.*

There are four audiences that need to be targeted in particular:

- (a) Ministers and senior bureaucrats (CSMAC);
- (b) Chief Executive Officers of community service organisations;

- (c) Indigenous agencies and communities (SNAICC); and
- (d) Carers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) (AFCA).

The peak bodies who represent these audiences would then be able to effectively disseminate either the full report, or other products highlighting key messages from the research to their constituents who would include departmental policy makers and practice managers, and non-government organisation service providers.

State and territories have their own mechanisms for communicating information about the out-of-home care sector – however, the information needs to be distilled into useable formats that they can be easily disseminated.

There are a variety of options for publishing results from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse’s current research project. Each of these has implications for funding and organisational responsibility. These options include:

- a book/report – comprising both the literature review and empirical findings as a large single volume (could be both expensive and dense);
- smaller booklets based on specific sections (easier to digest);
- an executive summary (similar to the publication by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) based on the “Indigenous Parenting Project” conducted with Swinburne University of Technology TAFE, published July 2004 – it contains some photos, some statistics; but focusing on summaries and recommendations);
- a website (which organisation hosts the website, would need to be decided);
- journal article(s) in peer-review journals; and
- fact or resource sheets.

### **Options for oral dissemination**

Bridging the divide between research and practice is a perpetual problem that must be overcome for research to influence practice. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a strong oral tradition with much of their history and culture passed down in narratives from one generation to the next (Burchill and Higgins 2005). In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been shown to experience disproportionate levels of literacy and numeracy problems compared with the wider Australian population (ABS 2003). Thus oral rather than written descriptions of research findings would be a more culturally appropriate, enhancing the accessibility (and therefore the “take up”) of the research findings among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A culturally appropriate means of disseminating the research findings from this project is a series of presentations and workshops. Findings could be disseminated orally to key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups across Australia, enhancing the access and engagement of Indigenous people with these research findings. There are several options for disseminating research findings using this approach:

- preparation of material and dissemination coordinated and undertaken by staff from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies;
- preparation of material and dissemination coordinated and undertaken by staff from the an Indigenous organisation such as SNAICC;
- preparation of material and dissemination coordinated and undertaken by staff from an Indigenous organisation such as SNAICC in collaboration with the National Child Protection Clearinghouse based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies; or
- preparation of material by staff at the National Child Protection Clearinghouse based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (solely, or in collaboration with an Indigenous organisation such as SNAICC) with Indigenous professionals from key organisations across Australia, who would be trained by Clearinghouse staff to disseminate findings within their local areas (that is, a “train-the-trainer” model).

Input should be sought from representatives from the Indigenous community, in particular representatives from Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, on the most appropriate means of engaging with communities about the research findings and implications. Such an approach would be appropriate for both the immediate feedback of findings from this research and as an ongoing strategy for communicating promising practice initiatives to Indigenous communities.

### **Next steps**

Prior to confirming a dissemination strategy it would be appropriate to seek feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies or representatives, on the proposed dissemination strategy and involve them in the process of deciding on the best mechanisms, and who is the best person/agency to distribute the information and resources.

Further funding will need to be sought to develop the themed papers, resource sheets, and to develop all materials into written and oral form. Funding will also need to be sought to undertake the oral component of the dissemination strategy.