

# The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

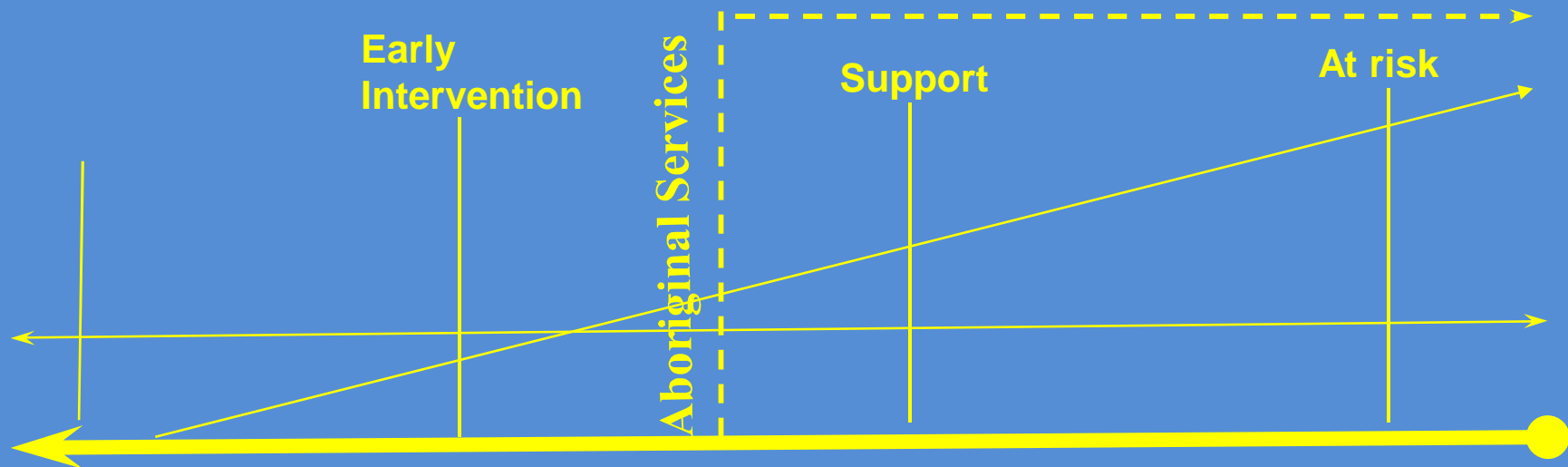


Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist  
Advice Support Service (ACSASS)

# OUTLINE OF OUR SESSION

- Introduction
- Brief overview of Lakidjeka ACSASS
- Partnership with DHS
- Case Examples
- Conclusions
  
- Can this approach /initiative work elsewhere?

# VACCA Service Continuum



- **Prevention:**
- Playgroups
- Koorie ABCD

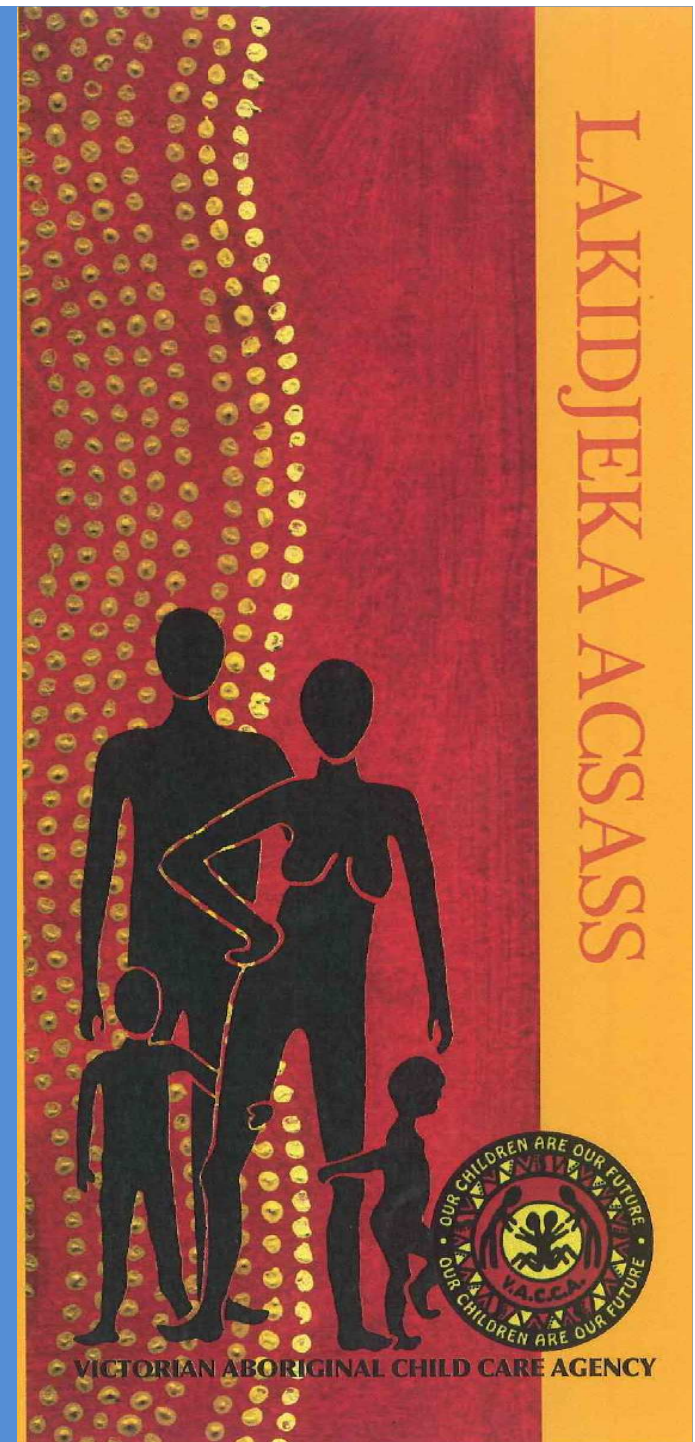
- **Early warning signs:**
- Innovations
- Family Support
- Home visiting

- **Problem identified:**
- Kurnai YHS
- Family Support
- Family Pres

- **Significant problem identified:**
- Lakidjeka
- Extended Care
- Permanent Care
- Residential Care
- Cultural Placement
  - Family Pres
  - AFDM
- Leaving Care

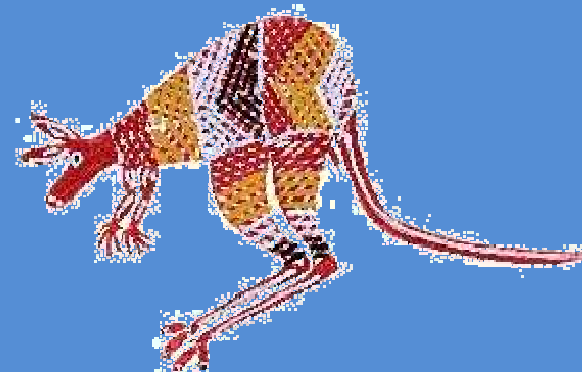
# LAKIDJEKA ACSASS

- Responds to reports from the Department of Human Services' Child Protection Services regarding Aboriginal children and young people across the state ( with the exception of Mildura LGA).
- Yorta Yorta for the child or children



# What is Lakidjeka ACSASS?

- Consultation and advice service responsible for carrying out the DHS/ VACCA Protocol
- Targets 0 -18 year olds and includes pre births.
- Open Child Protection cases only– from Intake to closure
- Expected to provide consultation and cultural advice on all significant decisions
- Key components of Service
  - Central Intake
  - Local Lakidjeka service
  - After Hours Service



## DHS/ VACCA Protocol

- The DHS/VACCA protocol formally establishes the consultation process
- Formal State Government/VACCA protocols
- State Government funding from October 2002
- Child Protection must seek consultation from ACSASS, may consult with other Aboriginal organisations
- Allows for secondary consultation
- Child Protection consults on all significant decisions for the life of the case

# Strengthening the Protocol Initiatives through Children, Youth and Families Act 2005

- In initial assessment of a report Child Protection must consult with ACSASS seeking advice, assessing risk and determining services (CYFA s 35 (1))
- Authorisation for exchange of information and access to record of information of protective intervention report (Section 206(2))
- In making a decision to place a child or young person, Child Protection must consult an Aboriginal agency (ACSASS) (S. 13 Aboriginal Child Placement Principle)
- Obligation of Child Protection to develop Cultural Support Plans

# The Partnership Arrangement between VACCA (ACSASS) & DHS

- ACSASS role negotiated and outlined in current Funding and Service Agreement
- DHS Practice Instruction
- Joint training and participation in training Child Protection(Beginning Practice)
- Agreed compliance between partners
- Liaison meetings – statewide and regional





# Working in Partnership with Child Protection (not in opposition)

- All caseworkers are Aboriginal and ensure that decision making by Child Protection takes into account Cultural knowledge and experience
- In working together
  - Still have agreed bottom lines around risk but appreciating cultural differences
  - Recognition that both parties have something to offer
  - Recognition of status and power
  - Established communication and liaisons which promote open and honest discussions and issues can be resolved.
  - Respect differences of opinions
  - Both parties independent

# The importance of ACSASS for Aboriginal children and young people

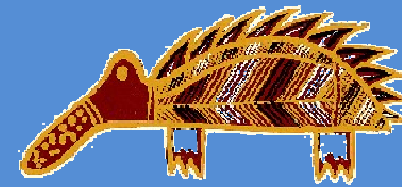
- Decisions being made by Aboriginal people themselves
- A recognised voice for Aboriginal Children
- Having a say in major decisions for children
- Decisions not be in isolation to culture
- Advice is on behalf of the child ( not necessarily on behalf of family)

# ACSASS consultation on all significant decisions

- Consultation to Child Protection on any significant decisions including
  - Whether to investigate a case
  - Case and placement planning
  - Applications to court
  - Breach, variation, revocation, or extension of order
  - Advice on referrals including Aboriginal Family Decision Making
  - Removal of children and young people
  - Other significant decisions e.g. secure welfare, placement changes
  - Case closure

# CASE STUDIES

# Case Study 1



- Young family , parents in their early 20's both Aboriginal, child 7 months
- Issues Family Violence & Drug and Alcohol
- Report to CP following a verbal fight at house, reporter concerned for the baby
- Intake – agreement to investigate on basis of age of child, young parents and follow up with services revealed that there were no real supports for family and appear unwilling to engage with services

# Case Study 1 - Approaches

- ACSASS encouraged parents to cooperate with DHS and helped the parents to understand the process of DHS.
- Helped the parents understand the legal role of DHS workers and ACSASS role
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- ACSASS worker explained in clear language getting parents to clearly understand that violence would impact on their small infant even though it wasn't physical - the infant would still be affected.
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- Encouraged first time parents to ask for assistants from professionals who have the knowledge on new born eg: MCHN in their small towns can be accessed through the local hospital.
- Encouraged the parents to talk about the type of services that THEY think they would benefit from and gave advice of what ACSASS knew ( or didn't).
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- Praised the parents in identifying their own issues and knowing the services that can help.
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- Helping parents to be honest with CP services and work together reassuring that things can be worked out and not to be so fearful of CP.
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- Encouraged CP to maintain voluntary work rather than issuing P.A

## Case Study 2

- Single mum with two children 13 & 10
- Long term substance use and violence between parents. Numerous people partying at house.
- Children being caught in middle of fights
- Case open for a number of months , all working voluntary until major incident and a Protective Application made, need for placement



# Case Study 2 Approaches

- ACSASS played a specific role at apprehension- in line with workers knowledge of parent and the need to diffuse rather than inflame situation.
- ACSASS advised as to what services( and individual workers) mum would respond to and how to work with mum – who can get very angry when she does not understand things or feels threatened
- ACSASS also advised around who were the positive support people within family- and keen for DHS to put in a AFDM referral



# Case Study 3

- Sibling group of 4 , one child lives with his father, and three are on GSO's, in placement with a mainstream organisation but in two separate placements
- Ages 7, 6 and 1
- Mother is Aboriginal, father of 3 youngest children is also Aboriginal, long term issues of trauma (mother), substance abuse, violence between adults.
- Children have had multiple moves and placements in Victoria and S.A. The 1 year old was placed from birth.
- Family options are limited

# Case Study 3 Approaches

- ACSASS raised issues informally and formally about poor consultation and lack of planning for children .
- Advised of key people to talk to in previous two rural regions (DHS and ATSI services) to get a better picture
- ACSASS was given the opportunity to contact extended family directly after DHS attempts to engage family had been unsuccessful.
- Workers visited Aunty to talk and hopefully facilitate a family placement for one of the children who was on his own and quite distressed in placement
- The visit was arranged after the writer contacted Aunty via phone – explaining who the worker was, what her Aboriginal connections were and the role of ACSASS.
- Meeting with family and ACSASS
- In the joint visits to family with DHS , ACSASS were able to alleviate concerns about what appeared to be overcrowding and talk in plain language what the DHS arrangements would be. Also explained to CP the high expectations it had towards family. Placement made
- ACSASS has made numerous attempts to engage and re engage with further extended family to facilitate a family placement for two siblings but attempts at contacting family have been unsuccessful at this stage.
- Workers have recommended that Child Protection explore a placement for child's siblings, in a location closer to his extended family and placement This would also children to reconnect with their extended family and their culture.

# Key Elements to ACSASS approach

- Understanding of what it means to be Aboriginal
- Knowledge of culture
- Respect for cultural differences
- Being able to talk in clear language
- Upfront , honest and straight
- Know local communities, know what goes on
- Clear about role



## Key elements (cont)

- Develop relationships with workers and services
- Try and lead by example
- Follow through even if not in full agreement with decision
- Knowing the system, how it works and why
- Being passionate , challenging practice and sharing knowledge to others
- Working in a respectful way

# Conclusion

- DHS/VACCA Protocol and legislation provides basis for ACSASS role
- Influencing the decision making process depends on having a respectful and strong voice with Child Protection and recognition of true partnership
- Having dedicated local workers with links and knowledge to work with local Aboriginal and non Aboriginal services is core to the success.
- Partnership has to be resourced adequately and recognised formally and within community

# Conclusion

- There needs to be recognition that both parties Child Protection and ACSASS have skills, knowledge and expertise to offer each other and that each party respects and values the other.
- With this respect becomes the hope that the Aboriginal community through a service such as ACSASS will begin to take on the responsibility for decision making for at risk children
- Then we will truly be able to make “Our Decisions Our Way”

# CONTACT DETAILS

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