

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
Targeted Family Support
Service

Tyerrtye Arntarnte-Areme
"Caring for People"

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TFSS Service Description

- ❑ Partnership with Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) and Northern Territory Family and Childrens (NTFC) services
 - ❑ Purpose: As part of Differential Response Framework to provide family support early, to prevent children entering the child protection system
 - ❑ Combined NT & Commonwealth funding of \$1 million per year
 - ❑ Alice Springs based service (not remote)
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Keep in mind...

- ❑ First service of its kind in NT
 - ❑ Started taking referrals Feb 2009 – initially CP referrals only, now includes community referrals (55% CP, 45% community)
 - ❑ Early days – still refining model and learning as we go
 - ❑ We are seeing a particular population of Aboriginal families
 - ❑ Sample size in 2010 of 39 families / 88 children
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The Questions...

- ❑ What are the learnings and challenges in relation to child rearing and parenting?
 - ❑ Have we made a difference? To whom and about what?
 - ❑ How do we respond to complex family issues in a meaningful way?
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The Questions continued...

- What are the critical ingredients to consider in service design when building and delivering relevant and responsive services to children and families in the Alice Springs context?
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Challenges

- ❑ The environmental context and complexity - systemic issues impacting on children & families
 - ❑ The environmental context and its impact on workers – organizational context, recruitment, workforce development
 - ❑ Understanding, interpreting and assessing what we see in order to provide a 'child focused and family centred' approach
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Commonly expressed view

- The level of **accepted** 'risk' to children is higher in NT than other states and territories in Australia
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What we observe

- Living environments for many children referred to TFSS expose them to
 - high incidence of substance affected adults,
 - frequent violence,
 - scarcity of basic resources including food and clothing
 - Overcrowding, family humbug, and poor living conditions

*It is difficult at times **not** to draw the conclusion that there are simply some environments where children should not be present.*

Primary Presenting Issues for 39 families with 88 children, Jan to June 2010

- Financial, overcrowding, housing 19 (49%)
 - Child neglect (physical, emotional, medical) 19 (49%)
 - Children exposed to DV 11 (28%)
 - Carer substance abuse 11 (28%)
 - School attendance issues 10 (26%)
 - Child behaviour issues 9 (23%)
 - Over burdened carer (grandmother) 5 (13%)
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What we observe

Disjunctions between

- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal lifestyles (laws, beliefs, values, language, family make up, kin relationships, priorities in life, aspirations, cultural responsibilities, etc)
 - For children - home and school life, public life and private life (different language and behavioural expectations)
 - For adults - difficulties in negotiating essential services such as Centrelink, banking, housing,
 - Practical difficulties in maintaining a 'house', operating an oven, washing machine, etc
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Critical ingredients for service design

- ❑ A relationship based approach enables more informed assessment
 - ❑ Indigenous workers are critical in building these relationships, interpreting observations, informing assessment and guiding service response
 - ❑ Ecological assessment
 - ❑ FSNA – includes caregivers and children, ongoing, determines case plan
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Critical ingredients for service design continued...

- ❑ Work with children and families depends on a capacity to interpret and understand family interactions and intimate relationships.
 - ❑ To do this effectively requires knowledge of the particular family culture and the broader cultural context.
 - ❑ Language is important
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Critical ingredients for service design continued...

- ❑ If we accept that culture is central to the healthy development of children, then worker knowledge of language, skin and kin relationships and responsibilities, and cultural obligations is essential.
 - ❑ Working in pairs with Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers has proved very effective for TFSS
 - ❑ Small caseloads with capacity to do intensive work over long period of time
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Critical ingredients for service design continued...

- Allow time
 - Family focused activities – BBQs, photos
 - Relationships with children
 - Brokerage
 - Community Child Protection Worker
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Have we made a difference? To whom and about what?

Service goals

- 1. Create support options for vulnerable children and their families*
 - 2. Engage service providers in collaborative practice to keep children safe*
 - 3. Divert 'high needs, low risk' families away from further involvement with Child Protection*
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Have we made a difference? To whom and about what?

1. Create support options for vulnerable children and their families

Immediate outcomes for families reflected in CDU Evaluation 2009:

- Parents able to maintain children in their care
 - Changed behaviours for both caregivers and children
 - Some children re-engaging with school
 - Some new employment opportunities for carers
 - Higher levels of engagement and access to a range of support services including health, legal, education and other specialist services
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Have we made a difference? To whom and about what?

2. Engage service providers in collaborative practice to keep children safe

- Case management approach – brings services together with the family
 - Focus on work with schools – strengthening relationships between families and schools, joint initiatives around transition to school, managing challenging behaviors, providing consultation to teachers, participating in family days
 - New initiative re impact of DV on children involving a number of services
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Have we made a difference? To whom and about what?

3. Divert 'high needs, low risk' families away from further involvement with Child Protection

- This is difficult to measure
- Of 39 families with 88 children there have been 14 (36%) re notifications

Note: Initial referrals to TFSS reflected families where there was a high level of risk already present

What can we learn?

- ❑ Despite the many challenges most families manage to raise their children well
 - ❑ What can we learn from their experiences that might help us in our work with families who are more vulnerable?
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Long time coming...

- This film was made to capture some of the important aspects of positive child rearing for Aboriginal families in the Northern Territory
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