

# **Comprehensive support for Indigenous carers and young people**

**This project was conducted as a collaboration between the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care**



Australian Government

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**SNAICC**

## National Child Protection Clearinghouse

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse has operated from the Australian Institute of Family Studies since 1995. The Clearinghouse is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as part of its response to child abuse and neglect. The Clearinghouse collects, produces and distributes information and resources, conducts research, and offers specialist advice on the latest developments in child abuse prevention, child protection, and out-of-home care.

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**The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC)** is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) works across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and children's services sector to produce and distribute practical resources and information.

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# Comprehensive support for Indigenous carers and young people



## Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost five times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care compared with non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Yet there is a serious shortage of culturally appropriate placements to accommodate them. Even with intensive recruitment efforts, professionals have been unable to recruit sufficient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers to meet the demand.

## Project background

### *Phase 1: Identifying Strengths and Barriers*

In 2005, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, was commissioned by the Australian Council for Children and Parenting's (ACCAP) Children at Risk Committee, to conduct:

- A literature review titled *The Recruitment, Retention and Support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers: A Literature Review*. (Richardson, Bromfield, & Higgins, 2005); and

Interviews and focus groups with professionals from government, non-government and Indigenous organisations, as well as carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and Indigenous young people in care, titled *Enhancing Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People*. (Higgins, Bromfield, & Richardson, 2005).<sup>2</sup>

In the interviews and focus groups, participants were asked to talk about what they thought were barriers to recruiting, assessing, training carers and supporting carers and young people, and the strategies that worked well. The project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

Professionals, carers and young people told us of barriers and gaps in program and service delivery, and identified ineffective practices such as culturally inappropriate assessment tools and training programs. The participants highlighted the need to develop more effective and culturally relevant recruitment, assessment and training strategies. Carers also told us they needed more support in a range of areas such as dealing with state and territory child protection departments, and caring for children with increasingly complex needs. Young people told us they wanted more connection with their family and communities while in care. Importantly, the participants also identified examples of promising practice in the field, where effective and culturally relevant strategies had been developed to overcome barriers in these areas.<sup>3</sup>

### *Phase 2: Profiling Promising Programs*

In response to the needs identified by the participants, and guided by the examples of promising practice they shared with us, FaCSIA granted funding to AIFS to extend the program to profile promising practices in the sector (this phase of the project is referred to as *Phase 2: Profiling Promising Programs*). The term 'promising' describes programs that have been successful in meeting their goals and objectives, but which have not necessarily been externally evaluated. While a few of the profiled programs had been externally evaluated, the majority had not, and the term 'promising' applies to the collection of organisations profiled for this project.

In mid-2006, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in collaboration with SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care), profiled promising programs and services across Australia in order to disseminate the information to other professionals in the sector.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2007). *Child Protection Australia 2005–06*, AIHW, Canberra: Author.

<sup>2</sup> Summary papers prepared from the reports are available on the NCPC website [www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/promisingpractices/summarypapers/menu.html](http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/reports/promisingpractices/summarypapers/menu.html)

<sup>3</sup> The term 'children' is used in this booklet to refer to both children and young people. Where programs and services directly relate to older children, the term 'young people' is used.

## **The booklets**

The findings from Phase 2 are presented in four individual booklets. Each booklet covers a theme in relation to out-of-home care with profiles of successful programs and services relevant to that theme. Where practicable, profiles are accompanied by practice models relating to that theme.

In booklet 1, *Characteristics of promising Indigenous out-of-home care programs and services*, common characteristics of the programs and services that we profiled are outlined. These cover two areas: organisational practice and service delivery.

In booklet 2, *Assessing, training and recruiting Indigenous carers*, specific programs that assess and train Indigenous general and kinship carers are profiled, and a model of how successful organisations have conducted effective carer recruitment, based on the findings from Phase 1, is also included.

In booklet 3, *Comprehensive support for Indigenous carers and young people*, programs that offer comprehensive support for carers and young people are profiled in detail.

In booklet 4, *Indigenous responses to child protection issues*, programs that collaborate with child protection services to enhance culturally relevant responses to child protection issues are profiled.

### ***Characteristics of Promising Indigenous Out-of-Home Care Programs and Services***

Section 1: *Organisational practice*

Section 2: *Service delivery*

A common characteristic of the organisations profiled was that they take a ‘ground up’ rather than a ‘top down’ approach to service development and delivery by consulting with community leaders. Their service provision is driven by the ongoing needs of their communities or client groups. This was true for carer support programs, training programs and programs that supported young people in care.

Professionals told us of the importance to them of strengthening and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and most programs we profiled incorporated strategies to achieve this. Professionals empowered communities and client groups by: advocating on their behalf, providing communities or client groups with knowledge and skills, and by building connections between communities or client groups so they could benefit from shared experiences and a common purpose.

The successful organisations profiled had similar management styles. They had strong leadership, were clear on what their core business was and operated within the boundaries of this, and took a collaborative, teamwork approach with staff within a flat organisational structure. In these organisations, staff felt valued, had autonomy over their program delivery and had input into the organisation’s decision-making processes.

Successful managers told us that developing strong relationships with external stakeholders was the key to getting the department or other organisations on board to fund or approve projects. Professionals told us that taking a confrontational or aggrieved approach rarely got them what they wanted. Instead, effective professionals arm themselves with facts or information when engaging in negotiations. This helps them gain the support of government departments and other organisations and secure funding for new or ongoing projects.

An outcome of establishing effective relationships with stakeholders was that staff became spokespeople for their organisation in the wider community. Through lobbying, advocacy and speaking at forums and meetings, the organisation and its staff become known to external stakeholder groups, which in turn may increase their profile and influence. This has the benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of introducing more culturally appropriate ways of addressing child protection and out-of-home care issues, as well as bringing more cultural awareness into the mainstream Australian community.

### ***Assessing, Training and Recruiting Indigenous Carers***

- *Step by Step* – Aboriginal assessment tool (Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies, in collaboration with the Department of Community Services, Aboriginal Services Branch, Sydney, NSW)
- *Yarning about Kids with Yorganop Carers* – Indigenous-specific training program for general and kinship carers (Yorganop, Perth, WA)

- *Growing Up Our Kids Safe and Strong* – Indigenous-specific training program for kinship carers (Department for Child Protection, formerly the Department for Community Development, Fostering Services, Perth, WA)

## **Comprehensive Support for Indigenous Carers and Young People**

### *Comprehensive support for carers*

- *Aboriginal Carers Network* – Carer support groups (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, Sydney, NSW)
- *IFACSS* – Comprehensive support service for kinship and general carers (Indigenous Family and Child Support Service, Brisbane, Qld)

### *Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care*

- *Keeping Kids Connected* – Short-term emergency placements with non-Indigenous carers (Aboriginal Family Support Services, Adelaide, SA)
- *Panyappi* – Mentoring service for Indigenous young people (Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, Adelaide, SA)
- *Marungbai* – Leaving and after care service for Indigenous young people (Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Services, Taree, NSW)

## **Indigenous Responses to Child Protection Issues**

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

## **Workshop materials from the booklets**

A workshop for professionals based on the material in the booklets has been developed to enable professionals to share their experiences, and to explore the suggestions outlined in the booklets. (See 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*. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care). For more information on the workshops contact the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care on (03) 9489 8099.

## **The overlapping nature of the themes**

An important finding from the consultations was the overlapping nature of recruitment, assessment, training and support programs and services for enhancing outcomes for carers, children and young people. For example:

- Quality training programs consistently include broader carer support functions such as a telephone support service and advocacy with government departments on behalf of carers;
- Carers who receive good support or and training from their organisations often bring potential carers to the organisation, thereby facilitating the recruitment of new carers;
- Carers who are appropriately trained and resourced develop skills, knowledge and confidence in their caring role. This leads to improved outcomes for children and young people in their care;
- Children and young people whose needs are being met through culturally appropriate placements with well-resourced carers, or by programs designed to support their needs, demonstrate increased wellbeing such as improved school attendance, a reduction in problem behaviours, and an enhanced sense of identity and cultural connectedness.

# Comprehensive support for carers – Messages from professionals and carers

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In *Phase 1: Identifying Strengths and Barriers*, when carers were asked what kind of support they needed, they most often responded that if the children in their care were adequately supported, they felt supported. For themselves, carers told us they needed:

- Adequate financial support;
- Practical and emotional support;
- Respectful relationships with the department;
- Support for kinship and informal placements.

In *Phase 2: Profiling Promising Programs*, the following two programs, which provide comprehensive support for carers, were profiled:

- *Aboriginal Carers Network* – Carer support network (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, Sydney, NSW)
- *IFACSS* – Comprehensive support service for kinship and general carers (Indigenous Family and Child Support Service, Brisbane, Qld)

As discussed on page 5, service delivery often overlaps, and organisations that offer services in other areas such as training, may also offer comprehensive support for carers, for example, the *Yorganop* program profiled in booklet 2. In section 1 of this booklet we focus on programs that directly aim to support carers. In section 2 of this booklet we focus on programs that support children and young people in care.

## What works when supporting carers

### Support services for carers work best when staff:

- Advocate for carers in dealing with child protection departments when necessary
- Provide needs-based, comprehensive, responsive support
- Empower carers by enabling knowledge-sharing and skill-building
- Empower carers through unity, eg carer support group meetings and community events

# Aboriginal Carers Network

## Carer support groups, Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat, Sydney, NSW

‘We want groups that are autonomous and run themselves. We don’t want to be telling them how to do it. [We] want to help them establish relationships and have connectedness with each other, sharing resources and ideas with each group.’

The *Aboriginal Carers Network* (ACN) is an initiative of the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat’s (AbSec) Foster Carer Support Service. The *Aboriginal Carers Network* is a collection of carer groups that have formed throughout metropolitan, regional and rural New South Wales. Since January 2005, the number of groups has grown from one to 20, and 278 carers are formally affiliated with the *Aboriginal Carers Network* carer groups.

As well as building new groups, AbSec’s Foster Carer Support Service supports carers through advocacy, facilitates training, and provides carers with knowledge and skills. In particular, the *Aboriginal Carers Network* aims to meet the needs of carers who want information about their rights and the rights of children in their care, and skills in dealing with child protection departments.

Carer groups meet monthly so members can share their knowledge and experiences. Forums for group representatives are held quarterly, and annual events such as the ‘Big Day Out’ bring carers together in a community environment, where they are acknowledged for the challenging and demanding work they do.

### Getting the *Aboriginal Carers Network* up and running

January 2005	Terry Donnelly appointed as manager to establish new carer groups
Throughout 2005	Manager visits communities across NSW to talk about the advantages of forming carer groups
November 2005	Sydney Carer Forum held – development of COPE strategy: ‘Connecting Our People Everywhere’
July 2006	Tamworth Carer Representative Forum – New name <i>Aboriginal Carers Network</i> agreed on by carers
Late 2006	Groups grow to 20, with 278 <i>Aboriginal Carers Network</i> members across the state

### *Visiting communities to talk about developing a carer network*

Terry Donnelly was appointed manager of AbSec’s Foster Carer Support Service in January 2005. His first initiative was to visit communities and talk about what he hoped to achieve by developing a carer group network, and how the groups could benefit carers.

‘In each region you go to you have to develop relationships to start it off. Taking the initiative and going to these groups and talking about what you’d like to achieve and where you’d like to go and getting the carers there. And showing passion for what you do and for the carers’ wants and needs. You just make a start.’

### *Meeting with the department and non-government organisations*

The manager initially attempted to set up meetings with the NSW Department of Community Services offices around the state and relevant non-government organisations to talk about his role and the aim of building carer groups throughout NSW. One early strategy was to ask the Department of Community Services and non-government organisations to do mail-outs to their carers advising them of when he was going to speak in

their area. However, he found that often carers did not receive the information and the turnout of carers and potential carers was generally low.

### ***Building groups by responding to needs for assistance***

The manager found instead that the best way of forming carer groups was taking a needs-based approach to group development by responding to requests for assistance. He did this by:

‘Getting out there and [doing] community consultation and networking and working with member agencies of which there are nine. We didn’t target any particular areas. As phone calls came in, requests for assistance showed me where the need was... There wasn’t a strategy. And I don’t think you could set up a strategy to begin with and say, “I’m going to go there, there and there and set up support groups”. We’ve gone to some areas and towns and tried to do that and we can’t get anything going. So we’re just working with the need and where they want things to happen. And where demand is.’

### ***Development of the COPE strategy***

In November 2005, the first carer forum was held in Sydney. At this forum the COPE strategy, ‘Connecting Our People Everywhere’, was developed. The COPE strategy takes a long-term approach to carer support by building groups, improving conditions for kinship and foster carers, strengthening relationships with departments and organisations, and working towards the integration of policy and practice for kinship and foster care.

The COPE strategy comprises the development of regions, and holding regular meetings with group representatives from the regions. The first step in the COPE strategy was a carer representative forum held at Tamworth in June 2006.

‘We got our twenty reps from across the state together at Tamworth for a day and a half. We looked at where we were at and it was amazing the resilience and the confidence the carers showed seven months down the track from last November (carer meeting). It was a great coming together.’

### ***Planning carer gatherings***

At the Tamworth forum the group developed the next phase for the COPE strategy, which was to set up a calendar for the following year’s regional meetings and to plan a state gathering in November of each year. At the annual gatherings, carers would also be recognised for the work they do. One carer from each region is chosen by the regional representatives and acknowledged as ‘Carer of the Year’.

### ***Choosing a new name***

An initiative to come out of the Tamworth representative forum was that carers chose a new name for their group, the *Aboriginal Carers Network*, which was seen as an inclusive name that reflects the diversity of caring roles.

‘[Carers] wanted to move away from “Foster Care Support Group” because [they wanted] a name that is more empowering. They also want recognition of kinship carers in groups, and to show that care is about community care and societal care... Caring for kids has to be addressed at every level. These aunties aren’t going to change the world, they need community participation.’

### ***Growing carer groups***

A main aim of the COPE strategy is to continue to build carer support groups and expand the network of groups state-wide. One way the AbSec’s Carer Support Service does this is by attending community events, networking, and promoting the *Aboriginal Carers Network*.



‘We get out to all the community things that are happening and... set up stands and we develop groups that way. At the community events, all of a sudden we’re talking to Aunty Flo about this and that and the next thing you know is that we’ve got the nucleus to set up another group. We go away with a couple of names and set up a community meeting and get flyers out in that area and encourage people to come along... And the right rep. will pop her head up and things will get started.’

Terry described a ‘bring a friend’ strategy for building group membership. He encourages this approach with carers trying to start local groups:

‘[When you] go back to your home town, grab an aunty and you two sit down and have a cup of tea. I’ll send you out monthly information packages and you two have a yarn about it. And when you leave, make a pact to go and get one more [carer] each. And then when you’re four at the next meeting, get one more each the next month. So the group grows that way or through the advocacy work that we do when we give names of local representatives, and promotional stuff like flyers. We had to look at ways of growing these groups and the capacity to grow them in each town.’

### ***Branding and promoting the Aboriginal Carers Network***

Another initiative of the COPE strategy has been to design a recognisable ‘heart’ logo that represents the *Aboriginal Carers Network* and develop promotional material such as flyers embossed with the *Aboriginal Carers Network* logo so that the material is instantly recognisable to carers across the state.

‘And I guess that’s another element of [growing the groups] now is that we’re heavily promoting the program through flyers, attending anything that we can. We’ve got a range of promotional material. I also developed the “heart” [logo], because everything revolves around the heart and spirit and soul, the heart is on everything. We wanted a brand that people would recognise so that if our people see a little pink heart hopefully our people will recognise that as the *Aboriginal Carers Network*... The heart is what you need to be a good carer.’

### ***Building relationships with stakeholder groups***

In order to strengthen relationships with departments and organisations, the manager meets with staff members to discuss the *Aboriginal Carers Network*, and through doing so broadens their understanding of cultural issues, often gaining support on new strategies.

‘We have looked at cultural support plans and developed a focus group with departmental foster care managers and Aboriginal case workers in the three Sydney regions. We have made a lot of changes through that focus group. The group is working together to create a “Big Day Out” for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers state-wide, and to develop new recruitment strategies to address the severe shortages we currently have. Things are bubbling here in Sydney. We want to take this beyond Sydney. We’re currently developing relationships with departmental staff across other regions and building feedback loops for our people.’

The improved relationships with departmental staff has had flow-on benefits for carers and carer groups, who now find they can discuss issues effectively with departmental staff.

‘One of the strategic things we have done is that in Sydney there are three [departmental] regions and each of the three regions has a foster carer support manager who is responsible for foster care across the whole region; and under those support managers we have Aboriginal workers. Wonderful people, great relationship. I don’t need to advocate for carers in Sydney any more. If a carer has an issue, I see what region they’re in and send it off to the appropriate manager who will then act on their behalf, at the same time developing relationships between themselves and the carer, gaining the trust of the carer instead of the mistrust that has been prevalent over the years.’

# How to empower carers in their dealings with child protection departments

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

One of the main functions of Absec's Carer Support Service is to support and empower carers and carer groups, particularly in their dealings with the child protection department. If a carer needs assistance, the service will:

- Advocate on their behalf;
- Provide them with knowledge and skills about child protection processes;
- Link them with carer groups so they feel more connected and less isolated.

Through the combination of these three steps, carers and carer groups feel supported, develop the confidence to deal with government departments directly, and are connected with other carers through the *Aboriginal Carers Network*. The outcome for carers is increased confidence and empowerment in their caring role and their dealings with statutory departments, as well as membership of a larger, state-wide carer network. The benefit to AbSec is that, by assisting carers to become more competent and independent, carers' demands on the organisation's resources are reduced. Overall, a supported and empowered carer network can effect better outcomes for children.

## **Advocacy**

The service first takes the approach of advocating for carers, by gathering the relevant information and presenting this to departmental workers on behalf of the carers. Carers feel a sense of empowerment from receiving this support.

'One of the things that came out of [the annual carers' meeting] and the annual report, is that we're taking away fear from the carers who go into [the department] and the new case worker says, "Under Section... you're not entitled to anything," and going away totally confused and no better off than where they were. This has always been an issue for our carers, this lack of knowledge, and at times our carers' literacy levels. It has left them totally confused and disempowered. What we do is if they call us, we copy the relevant legislation or procedure, highlight the section, ask the carer to take it in [to the departmental worker], and then say, "This is your obligation." Our carers are feeling really empowered... We advocate for them 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.'

However, it is important to take a balanced approach when advocating for carers.

'[You] can't get too caught up in a carer's issue when they speak to you. Sometimes you have to go back to them and say, "The department's got a right here." Sometimes you're mediating for the department as well.'

## **Knowledge and skill building**

The service also provides information and advice to carers so that if they need to deal directly with the department they are armed with the knowledge they need to present their case.

The Service also assists carers and carer groups to develop the skills to negotiate effectively with departmental workers.

'We're here to educate [carers] and to educate the group. We don't have militants. I've never displayed anger to a [departmental] worker and I wouldn't expect carers to do this. You've got to have political savvy and we're teaching them that. We had a workshop... on developing relationships with government departments.'

## ***Connectedness with carer groups***

Carers are encouraged to join carer groups so they have a sense of connectedness with other carers and do not feel vulnerable or isolated when visiting departmental workers to request resources or sort out issues. A strategy has been developed whereby each carer is accompanied and supported by another carer from their carer group when meeting to discuss an issue with a departmental staff member.

‘No carer goes alone. If they have an issue with the department, having to go in there and confront them, they go with another carer. If they need information on a particular issue they call us. We help them with information regarding the Act and the department’s policies and procedures. We do whatever is required of us at the time and give them an opinion on what we think.’

## ***Conclusion***

With the combination of advocacy, knowledge sharing, and building connectedness, carers gain the confidence to be able to build relationships with departmental workers and develop a sense of independence in their caring role.

‘It’s got to a point where most of the groups can go to the department and say, “We want training in this,” and know that the department has an obligation to provide that training... We don’t have the capacity to organise training ourselves but we help set it up through the department or through the [non-government organisations]. Most of the time now they’re able to do that themselves because of the relationships they have developed with the department in their local area.’

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## **How the groups work**

### ***Finding the right group leader***

When starting a new group it is important to find the right person to run the group. A good group leader is someone who has a good acceptance within the community and is passionate.

‘[A good group leader is] passionate about what they do, can see the injustice, is driven to help others, and has love in their hearts. They don’t have to be knowledgeable about the Act, legislation, etc. We’re here to educate them and educate the group.’

Group representatives are unpaid and work out of their own homes. Sometimes a ‘deputy’ leader is also appointed when there is a high demand for support by carers. The manager initially helps the leader set the group up and provides ongoing support.

‘I do put a lot of responsibility on them at times when there’s a lot of requests and a lot of bad relationships with the department. But I’ll do what I can to help them understand their rights and get some support – emotional support as well.’

The benefit to group members is that leaders and members develop their own direction for the kind of support they need in their caring role.

‘They set about trying to set their own agenda so that if they want training, or they want some kind of support, we try to help them out.’

A benefit of skilling and empowering carers to deal directly with child protection departments is that it frees up the manager’s time, helping to ensure AbSec’s resources are not stretched too thinly.

## ***Strengthening cultural bonds: building resilience for Indigenous children and carers***

One of the great benefits of carer group meetings to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and the children in their care is that they include traditional practices, which enable people to maintain connections with their cultural roots. When *Aboriginal Carers Network* groups meet, members have the opportunity to share in spiritual practices and dreamtime stories, strengthening their cultural identity and feelings of belonging. For children in care, this is particularly important as strengthening a child's sense of culture is an effective way of building a child's resilience and is in accord with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>4</sup>

'I'm very spiritual and I like to bring this to the groups. We have an understanding of the spirit and we talk about that at groups – that's the void that's missing in a lot of our kids. We tell dreamtime stories and retain the culture in that way. It's very important when you relay that message if you are Indigenous because when you're telling those stories you've got to be able to feel them. We do spend time at our meetings on the spirit and the stories because a lot of our people have lost the spirit and the dreaming and they need to be educated in that way too, as well as the kids. We set up community supports so if they want to learn that spirituality, we can provide the right people to speak to.'

Not only do group meetings provide an opportunity for collective participation in spiritual practices, but group members also have the opportunity to make connections with members of the local community who have traditional knowledge and can teach carers and children about their cultural roots and practices.

'What would happen within the group, because it's a local organisation and local people, is that if they want to talk about spirituality there's always someone within your community that can talk about that. Being part of the support group allows access to that culture and that identity in many different ways. So if you want the child to learn about spirituality and the dreaming, well there's always an aunty who can talk about that who's a storyteller, so I'll hook you up with them.'

## ***Benefits for non-Indigenous carers***

Non-Indigenous carers are also able to link in with regional *Aboriginal Carers Network* groups, which in turn enables them to maintain the cultural identity of the Indigenous children in their care.

'They're now developing support groups for non-Indigenous carers. There are non-Indigenous carers crying out for ways to retain the child's identity and culture. I give them a rep's name and say get along to this support group. They'll mentor you into the community and help you to maintain the culture of the Aboriginal children in your care.'

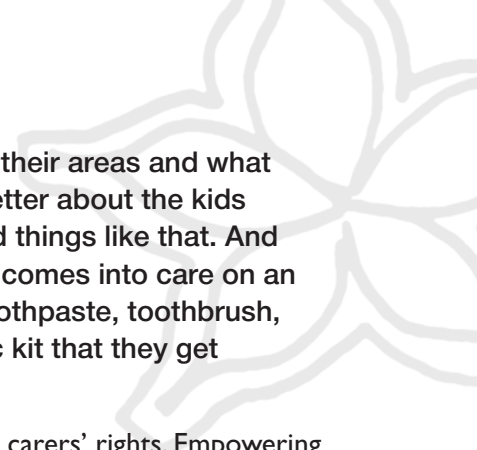
Another important strength of the *Aboriginal Carers Network* is that the carer groups are often able to find placements for children with kin or community members when departmental efforts have not been successful, thereby enhancing carer recruitment. This is a significant strength of the network given the shortage of culturally appropriate placements for Indigenous children across the country and the difficulty described by many professionals of recruiting new carers.

## ***Empowering caring communities through unity***

The combined benefits of carer group membership, knowledge and skill sharing, and reinforcing cultural and community bonds are that carers are strengthened by a sense of belonging to their caring community. Some groups develop their own initiatives to share information and address emerging needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Article 30 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines that '...a child... who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.'



‘[At the annual meeting] carers talked about what was happening in their areas and what they were doing with their groups. They’re putting together a newsletter about the kids and what’s happening with the kids and what they are achieving and things like that. And there are others who are setting up emergency kits for when a child comes into care on an emergency basis, the basic needs for a kid who comes into care: toothpaste, toothbrush, etc. So if a kid comes into care at 10 o’clock at night, there’s a basic kit that they get across to carers.’

The caring community itself has become an influential lobby group for protecting carers’ rights. Empowering carer communities has flow-on benefits for ensuring child protection issues are addressed and children’s needs are being met while in care.

‘At the end of the day this can only be beneficial to the department. If we’ve got a community somewhere and we’ve got foster carers, kinship carers, Elders and community people involved in that group and they’re addressing child protection issues in their community, that can’t hurt the department. But the department is a bit reticent because there’s this powerful lobby group. That’s the thing with [regional departmental office]. They don’t say no to carers any more. If [the carers] make 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 to 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.’

The information describing the *Aboriginal Carers Network* is an outline of the program. For more information contact the Aboriginal Child Family & Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) Inc., Level 7, 104 Bathurst Street, Sydney, NSW 2000, PO Box A2409, Sydney South, NSW 1235. Telephone: (02) 9264 0088. Fax: (02) 9264 0090. Or go to their website at: [www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au).

# Indigenous Family and Child Support Service (IFACSS)

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## Support for kinship and general carers, Brisbane, Queensland

IFACSS is a comprehensive support service for kinship and general carers who reside in the greater Brisbane area. IFACSS works in partnership with the Department of Child Safety's child protection service, and provides advice to families who are subject to statutory child protection intervention. IFACSS is a Recognised Entity<sup>5</sup> for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have entered the child protection system.

IFACSS is auspiced by the Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service (AICHS), which services the Indigenous population of the greater Brisbane area. The Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service was established in the early 1970s by community members to provide primary health care to the local Indigenous community. The health service is community-controlled and managed and has grown to become one of the largest Indigenous community organisations in Queensland. The health service also provides ancillary services such as youth services and healing (i.e. therapeutic) services that support their health care provision.

All IFACSS workers are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. They have a broad range of community and cultural knowledge, as well as some background knowledge of the families who become connected with the service. This enhances staff's capacity to work in an effective, empathetic and culturally-appropriate way with carers and families.

The IFACSS Shared Family Care Program, which is in its seventh year of service, offers out-of-home care recruitment, assessment, training and support for carers to ensure they have the skills and resources necessary to provide high-quality placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children needing out-of-home care.

The aim of IFACSS is to:

- Provide ongoing training for carers of children and young people in the care and protection system;
- Provide support to kinship and general carers;
- Meet the placement and support needs of children and young people separated from their families through the child protection system;
- Provide culturally appropriate placements to children and young people when removed from their parents;
- Ensure that children placed in out-of-home care are safe and well cared for within their families and communities, understand and identify with their culture, and access the same life opportunities afforded to other children and young people.

## Getting IFACSS up and running

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February 2001	IFACSS established
2002	Lyn Guidry appointed as manager of IFACSS
2003	Licensing evaluation process introduced by the Queensland state government, which led to a review of services.
2005	New Quality Care – Foster Care training package introduced
2006	Funding increased to expand service delivery

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<sup>5</sup> Recognised Entities are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individuals or organisations who are external to the Queensland Department of Child Safety and have expertise in, and knowledge of, child protection practices, policies and procedures.

## ***The establishment of IFACSS***

In 2000, the Queensland Department of Family and Communities (now the Department of Child Safety) approached the Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service to develop and provide services in the areas of child protection and out-of-home care for Indigenous children who could not remain in the care of their parents.

In February 2001, *IFACSS* was established to support the needs of carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and provide culturally appropriate placements for Indigenous children needing out-of-home care.

## ***Community consultation***

Workers then went out into the community and visited departments, government organisations and non-government organisations to raise awareness regarding the services *IFACSS* could provide and gain their support.

## ***Placement protocols drawn up***

Guided by the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle which was enshrined in the Queensland child protection legislation of 1999, protocols were drawn up and developed regarding how the Department of Child Safety and *IFACSS* would work together to place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and how they could achieve the best outcomes for children needing alternative placements. Staff conducted brainstorming sessions about the types of support they could provide for carers with the funding available.

## ***The service recruits more carers and develops culturally appropriate training and assessment packages***

In 2002, *IFACSS* undertook recruitment activities in order to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. A video training package was made available for carers who could not access training in Brisbane.

## ***Licensing evaluation introduced***

In 2003, a licensing evaluation process for shared family care between the department and out-of-home care organisations was introduced. The evaluation process included standards and attributes that organisations had to adhere to in order to become licensed. Reviewing and modifying processes and service delivery to meet the licensing conditions gave structure to the organisation, improved organisational standards and enabled staff to improve their recording process and documentation.

## ***New Quality Care Foster Care training package introduced***

In 2005, with the introduction of the *Quality Care – Foster Care* training package, *IFACSS* continued to develop its services to meet the needs of carers, children and families involved with its child protection services.

## ***Funding increased to provide more services***

In 2006, the Queensland government increased funding for *IFACSS* to provide services to more families in the community.

## ***Why IFACSS works so well***

### ***Co-location with the Indigenous child protection team***

A strength of *IFACSS* is that the service is co-located with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection (Recognised Entity) program. *IFACSS* staff have a close connection with the Indigenous child protection team, and this can enhance outcomes for children being placed in out-of-home care, as staff can readily discuss case-management directions with Indigenous child protection workers and provide a timely, responsive service when children need an out-of-home care placement.

‘The two programs complement and support each other, and may provide better outcomes because there is interaction and discussion between the two teams to determine what is needed and what is in the child’s best interests.’

### ***Matching of carers with children needing placements***

Due to their close working relationships with the child protection team, alternative care staff have access to relevant information about children who are entering care. This allows the service to endeavour to place a child with a kinship carer, or if not, a general carer, in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

Due to their co-location with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection program, staff sometimes have ‘advance warning’ that a child will need an out-of-home placement. This means that staff can make appropriate placement plans for the child before the situation becomes urgent, which in turn improves the likelihood of placement compatibility and stability. Staff are involved with the child from the commencement of a child going into care, which provides service continuity for the child.

### ***Providing holistic services for children in care***

Through its involvement with the Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service, staff can provide holistic services to clients by referring them to culturally appropriate medical, dental, therapeutic ‘healing’ and maternal and child health services.

Being part of the Aboriginal and Islander Community Health Service enables IFACSS to internally make referrals that are more likely to be responded to in a timely manner than if they were referred to an external service provider.

### ***Providing comprehensive support for carers***

An important aspect of IFACSS is the service they provide to carers, and the relationship they build with them. Workers have ongoing contact with carers.

### ***Keeping the community informed***

IFACSS hold several information sessions for prospective carers throughout the year, as well as participating in community cultural events such as NAIDOC week. Staff keep carers informed of events that may be of interest, as well as running other activities such as hosting a children’s Christmas party or events during Foster Carer week.

### ***Advocating on behalf of carers***

Staff advocate on behalf of carers with the Queensland Department of Child Safety when a carer needs additional support from the department for the children in their care and have not been able to obtain this themselves.

‘We’re there [for carers] for the good times and there for the difficult times.’

Staff would like to establish a carers’ support group and are considering ways to overcome the difficulties involved in bringing together carers who are scattered around the regions served by IFACSS.

### ***Collaborative relationships with government departments and non-government organisations***

IFACSS works in partnership with seven Department of Child Safety service centres in Brisbane. The service values the good working relationships that have been developed with departmental staff over the years, as well as their relationships with other out-of-home care services. IFACSS continues to build rapport and goodwill. It does this by working collaboratively and supportively with staff from the department and non-government organisations involved in child protection work, and takes a positive approach in reaching agreements by ‘meeting them half way’.



*IFACSS* has collaborated with the Department of Child Safety in developing its foster and kinship care program. Staff also work closely with the statutory child protection service in decision-making regarding the best interests of the child being placed in care, and attend placement meetings and family group meetings.

*IFACSS* has also built strong reciprocal relationships with other out-of-home care organisations and its workers participate in forums with other organisations in the foster care network.

### ***Recommending new carers to the department***

Because *IFACSS* undertakes its own culturally appropriate recruitment and assessment services, they are able to make recommendations to the Department of Child Safety regarding the eligibility of potential carers, with the department having final approval. The foster care training that *IFACSS* provides to new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers is delivered by Indigenous staff in conjunction with a departmental worker and an approved carer.

### ***Organisational culture***

Essential to the strong organisational culture at *IFACSS* is strong leadership, with the manager supporting staff, and the auspicing organisation supporting the goals and objectives of *IFACSS*.

*IFACSS* adheres to high standards of professionalism and service delivery, and staff feel that transparent, open, accountable processes enhance their relationship and credibility with stakeholders and clients.

A strength of *IFACSS* is the relaxed, friendly working environment, where staff have strong relationships with colleagues and feel valued and empowered in their roles.

Staff have a range of skills including a knowledge and understanding of child protection policies and procedures as well as an understanding of the legislation governing child protection issues.

Staff are also supported to build their skills by attending workshops and professional training in specific areas. All staff are undertaking Certificate IV In Community Services (Protective Care) training and most staff have also completed a Certificate IV Workplace Trainer and Assessor course. Staff also have opportunities to undertake other training internally such as a self-defence course and training in worker safety.

### ***Service effectiveness***

The effectiveness of the service is demonstrated in the number of children placed in appropriate placements in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

For more information on *IFACSS*, contact Lyn Guidry, Indigenous Family and Child Support Service, 44 Balaclava Street, Woolloongabba, Qld 4102. Telephone: (07) 3217 4112. Fax: (07) 3217 4311.

# Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care - Messages from professionals and young people

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Appropriate placements are becoming increasingly important as there are escalating numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people needing out-of-home care who have complex behavioural and psychological needs. This is not surprising given that many children and young people are placed in out-of-home care as a consequence of abuse and neglect. In section 1 of this booklet we profiled programs that directly aim to support carers. In section 2 of this booklet we profile programs that support children and young people in care.

In *Phase 1: Identifying Strengths and Barriers*, participants in the study talked about a number of needs to support children and young people in care, including:

- Specialist services;
- Cultural mentoring;
- Family contact;
- School-based support services;
- Informal supports for children in care;
- Planning for leaving care.

Another issue that was raised by participants in Phase 1 was the need to find alternative types of care when appropriate Indigenous placements cannot be found.

In *Phase 2: Profiling Promising Programs*, the following programs were profiled that provide intensive support for children and young people:

- *Keeping Kids Connected* – Short-term emergency placements with non-Indigenous carers (Aboriginal Family Support Services, Adelaide, SA)
- *Panyappi* – Mentoring service for Indigenous young people (Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, Adelaide, SA)
- *Marungbai* – Leaving and after care service for Indigenous young people (Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Services, Taree, NSW)

## What works in when supporting children and young people in out-of-home care

### Support services for Indigenous young people work best when staff:

- Assist the young person to reconnect / maintain connections with their families, communities and culture
- Take a family-inclusive approach to resolving issues and supporting the young person
- Build the young person's competence, identity and self esteem
- Are responsive to the young person's needs as they arise

# Keeping Kids Connected

## Short-term emergency placements for Indigenous children, Aboriginal Family Support Services, Adelaide, SA

*Keeping Kids Connected* is an initiative of the Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS). AFSS was established in 1978 as a response to the need to have a community-based Indigenous organisation involved in child welfare matters, and to provide support, assistance and advocacy for Aboriginal children, young people and their families. AFSS is located in Adelaide, South Australia, and services metropolitan and regional areas.

AFSS' *Keeping Kids Connected* program provides short-term, culturally appropriate emergency respite placements for Indigenous children when an Indigenous carer cannot be found. If no emergency respite places are available, AFSS then sources a placement through a non-Indigenous agency. The service also provides cultural consultation and support when children need to be placed with non-Indigenous carers.

The goal of the program is to ensure that Indigenous children, particularly those who are placed in non-Indigenous care, remain connected with their families, communities and culture. A key to achieving this goal was developing an effective referral process with the non-Indigenous placement provider when children needed to be placed with a non-Indigenous carer.

### Getting *Keeping Kids Connected* up and running

2003	Review of Indigenous children in non-Indigenous care conducted by Families SA – a significant number had lost contact with their families and communities.
2004	AFSS consulted regarding how to ensure Indigenous children remained connected to families and culture.
2004	Families SA assumed responsibility for extended family placement (kinship care).
Late 2004	Emergency respite house set up in Adelaide.
Late 2005	Emergency respite house set up in Port Augusta.

### *A review of Indigenous children in care*

In 2003, the department responsible for care and protection conducted a review of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal foster care. The review stated that approximately 25 per cent of these children were placed in non-Indigenous foster placements. AFSS staff contacted the department and requested the names of the children placed in non-Indigenous care. When the names were forwarded to the service they found that most of the children were unknown to AFSS and 'the names on the list were of children we had lost track of.'

'The sad part was when we got the list of [Indigenous] children's names [in non-Indigenous care] and didn't recognise them. We had lost contact, and that means they may have lost contact with their families and communities. And that was always behind the motivation for getting the program up and running.'

While AFSS did refer children to non-Indigenous placement organisations when an Indigenous placement could not be found, if the placement broke down with the non-Indigenous provider, the referral didn't come back to AFSS, so they lost track of that child.

'So we never knew when placements broke down and what happened to the kids and how many placements they may have had. We never knew about their connection to family and culture.'

## ***Developing Keeping Kids Connected***

In 2004, AFSS decided to identify ways in which they could keep Indigenous children in care connected with their families, communities and culture. This effort led to the development of the project now known as *Keeping Kids Connected*. The program is managed by Peter Laintoll.

‘The idea was to look at ways that AFSS could remain in the child’s life and to talk around the idea that if children are referred to a non-Indigenous agency, we stay involved as a partner, even if only as a resource.’

## ***When Aboriginal children are placed with non-Indigenous carers***

The next step in the *Keeping Kids Connected* strategy was to understand why some Aboriginal children were not being referred to Aboriginal care. AFSS found that some children were being referred to non-Indigenous care because the parents had requested this, or because the children had special needs such as severe physical or intellectual disabilities, and there were no Aboriginal carers available with expertise to provide for a child with special needs.

‘We always knew we had to have non-Aboriginal care as an option. We talked about it to Anglicare, that if an Indigenous child comes into [their] care, what supports do your carers need that we can provide?’

It was then recognised that, as some Indigenous children would need to be placed with non-Indigenous carers, it was important to develop protocols with the department and non-Indigenous organisations such as Anglicare (a major placement provider in South Australia).

## ***Collaborating with stakeholders to develop an effective referral process***

Through brainstorming at AFSS around how to prevent losing track of Indigenous children when they are placed by a non-Indigenous organisation, the service identified the need to develop an effective referral process between the department, Anglicare and AFSS.

‘We got the key people on side and we were all heading in the same direction and all had the same goals.’

AFSS staff then met with the manager of the department’s Placement Services Unit and senior staff with Anglicare to develop a referral process that would prevent children from being lost in the system, particularly when a placement with a non-Indigenous placement provider broke down.

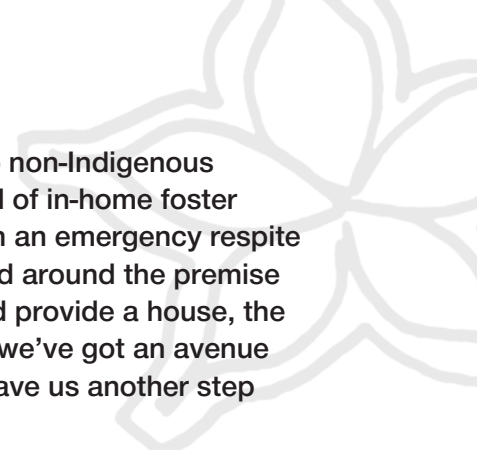
AFSS appointed a principal worker to oversee the referral process and provide cultural support and advice to Anglicare. The worker maintains regular contact with Anglicare staff and encourages Anglicare workers to contact AFSS if they need support or resources from the service.

‘We have open dialogue going. What we ended up with was a very good referral process.’

A working party comprising senior placement staff from AFSS, the department, and Anglicare meet regularly to discuss the status of children placed with a non-Indigenous carer. AFSS staff remain actively involved with Anglicare staff to ensure a cultural maintenance plan is developed and implemented and that Indigenous children in non-Indigenous care remain connected with their family and culture.

## ***Establishing emergency respite houses***

Another strategy to keep Aboriginal children connected with their culture is to devise ways to minimise referrals to non-Indigenous organisations. AFSS considered a range of options, then decided to establish emergency respite houses for short-term placement of Indigenous children. The respite houses provide AFSS with more time to locate an Indigenous placement for the child.



‘The next biggest challenge was to work out how do we not refer [to non-Indigenous agencies]. We began to look at a couple of different options. Instead of in-home foster care we looked at different ways of providing care and came up with an emergency respite house. One was already established in a regional area, which worked around the premise of a 28-day emergency placement. We would have a carer, we would provide a house, the carer goes in and is available 24/7. If a child needs emergency care we’ve got an avenue for that child to go to before they have to go into foster care. That gave us another step before that child has to go to non-Aboriginal care.’

By the end of 2004, AFSS had established an emergency respite house in Adelaide. By November 2005, another emergency respite house had been established in Port Augusta. AFSS then obtained funding to set up houses in Whyalla and Coober Pedy. AFSS found that the most important component for the emergency houses to work well is to find the right carer – someone who is committed and can dedicate their time to care for the children staying in the houses.

‘The key for the houses is finding the right carer. We set the house up so it can also be used for respite and for large sibling groups. Each house can sleep up to six. In the Adelaide house, in 10 weeks we had 22 placements through the house.’

## **Program outcomes**

AFSS have been successful in reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being placed with non-Indigenous carers.

‘We found our figures showed we had 20 per cent of kids going into non Aboriginal care prior to the project, and last we reported (six months ago) we had 1 per cent... Within the week we’d found a placement for them... We’ve turned a corner, we’re not just finding different placement types but remaining really active with other service providers so we don’t lose track of these kids. We’ve already started to see positives coming from the project.’

The *Keeping Kids Connected* program has been effective in ensuring that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do need to be placed with a non-Indigenous carer, they still maintain connections with their families, communities and culture.

The information on *Keeping Kids Connected* is an outline of the program. For more information contact Peter Laintoll, program manager, at Aboriginal Family Support Services, 134 Waymouth Street, Adelaide, South Australia 5000. Telephone: (08) 8212 1112. Fax: (08) 8212 1123, or go to their website at: [www.afss.com.au](http://www.afss.com.au).

# How to establish a referral process for non-Indigenous placements for Aboriginal children <sup>6</sup>

## ***Keeping Kids Connected - short term emergency placements***

### **1. Referral received**

- Referral received from the department's Central Alternative Care Unit (CACU).
- The Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS) duty officer writes up the referral, noting the children's names, ages, placement start and end date
- CACU follows up with AFSS to ensure referral was received and to provide any outstanding placement information.
- Duty officer investigates what placement options are available.
- Duty officer hands over information on the placement request to AFSS family support worker.

### **2. Placement options**

*If placement is sourced:*

- Family support worker informs the duty officer of the carer's contact details and other information regarding immediate placement issues and needs
- Duty officer contacts CACU to inform them that a placement has been sourced and completes and sends through paperwork.

*If placement is not sourced immediately:*

- AFSS duty officer emails an update on the status of all outstanding placement requests by 3.30 p.m. each day to CACU.

*If placement cannot be sourced:*

- CACU contacts Anglicare (non-Indigenous placement organisation) to arrange a short-term emergency placement.
- AFSS designated *Keeping Kids Connected* senior worker is contacted by CACU.
- CACU informs AFSS when placement is sourced.

### **3. Within one working day of placement**

- AFSS *Keeping Kids Connected* senior worker recontacts the Anglicare team to identify and contact the allocated Placement Support Worker.
- AFSS continues to identify a culturally appropriate placement.

### **4. Seven days after placement initiated**

- Meeting is convened with child protection case manager, *Keeping Kids Connected* senior worker, Anglicare Placement Support Worker and CACU worker (optional).
- Case plans, relative care options, special needs for child and placement plans are discussed.
- AFSS continues to try to identify a culturally appropriate placement option.
- If no culturally appropriate placement can be found, the duty officer advises CACU.
- CACU worker to advise child protection case worker.

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<sup>6</sup> The referral model is an extract of the *Referral Process from CACU–AFSS* document produced by AFSS.

- Case worker advises child and family about the referral to Anglicare.
- AFSS duty officer drafts referral letter to the appropriate Anglicare office.
- AFSS intensify/initiate a targeted recruitment campaign in specific areas to source appropriate carer.
- AFSS placement worker and Anglicare placement worker develop and implement a transition plan for child in consultation with carers and case worker.
- If AFSS has not sourced a placement by the second week a meeting is scheduled for day 21 after the placement was initiated with Anglicare.

### **5. Day 21 after placement initiated with Anglicare**

- Reconvene a meeting with all relevant stakeholders to reassess current placement status, update on developments and discuss any issues.

*If a placement has been identified:*

- Highlight a time frame if available, i.e. assessment commenced and estimated completion date.
- Develop a transition plan for the child into an AFSS placement or other service provider placement if required.

*If the placement is to continue long-term:*

- Schedule an Alternative Care Agreement meeting. The agreement is to include the Cultural Maintenance Document.
- The Cultural Maintenance Document is to be filled out with the case worker, carer, child or young person, Anglicare placement support worker and AFSS cultural maintenance adviser.
- The Cultural Maintenance Document to be reviewed regularly.

### **6. Respite**

- AFSS to provide respite for the child where possible.
- Child to have priority access to respite with siblings – access to occur as frequently as possible.
- The child to be invited to attend AFSS-run camps and youth group activities.
- Monthly updates on case to continue.

### **7. If a culturally appropriate placement has not been sourced and the current placement is not available long-term**

- Six weeks after placement initiated with Anglicare, a scheduled review meeting with all relevant stakeholders is to be conducted.
- Review placement options, issues or concerns.

### **8. Monthly update**

- AFSS Cultural Maintenance Advisor and Anglicare's Placement Support Worker reviews placement on a monthly basis and discuss any issues or concerns.
- AFSS provides support through advocacy or referral when required.
- AFSS provides information about cultural events, training and activities in which the carer and child can participate.

### **9. Annual review**

- AFSS cultural maintenance adviser to attend the annual review of the Alternative Care Agreement and cultural maintenance document.

# Panyappi (younger brother, younger sister)

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## **Mentoring for Indigenous young people, Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services, Adelaide, SA**

‘Mentoring has been a 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.’

*Panyappi* is an intensive, culturally appropriate mentoring program for Indigenous young people and their families. The young people have been – or are at risk of becoming – involved in the juvenile justice system. The program is auspiced by Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth and Family Services (MAYFS, formerly Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth Team) in Adelaide.

Many of the young people who engage with *Panyappi* are – or have been – involved in the child protection system. Some have been placed in out-of-home care as a result of protection orders, and others have been placed in residential care through juvenile justice orders or because they are unable to remain with their families and communities. Children with behavioural problems experience significant difficulty in finding a stable home environment, either with their family or in out-of-home care.

*Panyappi* supports these young people by reconnecting them with their families and communities, in some cases avoiding placements in out-of-home care. The *Panyappi* mentoring program can prevent young people from engaging in risk-taking behaviour, thereby breaking the cycle of intergenerational involvement in offending behaviour and the child protection system.

*Panyappi* targets specific geographical areas and develops collaborative relationships with other stakeholders in the area to collectively address the problems young people are experiencing, in particular offending behaviours and high-risk behaviours.

While *Panyappi* takes a family-inclusive approach, mentors focus on the individual needs of the young person. The families are included in all aspects of the young person’s goal setting, which is inclusive of goal setting for the family unit as well. As much as the young person is an individual, the program’s success has come from assisting the family unit to make changes as well as the young person. A high priority of the service is to rebuild and strengthen family connections, a culturally appropriate approach that differs from many mainstream youth services that do not engage families as a standard practice.

*Panyappi* aims to:

- Decrease the young person’s offending and high-risk behaviours and support them to change their attitude towards offending and high-risk behaviours;
- Decrease the young person’s involvement with the juvenile justice system and associated organisations;
- Work collaboratively with other organisations that share responsibility for the young person’s safety and wellbeing;
- Build resilience and empower young people and their families;
- Assist the young person to build a positive identity;
- Assist the young person to find a constructive direction in their life.

*Panyappi* does this by:

- Empowering the young person to make a positive change in their attitude towards offending and high-risk behaviours;
- Promoting self-awareness and self-determination;
- Building a sense of identity and belonging;
- Engaging young people in mentoring activities so they can experience a sense of success;
- Reconnecting young people with their families, communities and culture.



## Getting *Panyappi* up and running

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2000	Proposal for a 12-month mentoring service auspiced by MAYFS (known then as MAYT) accepted by the South Australian Government Attorney General's Department.
2001	Project scope revised to fund a 2-year program for an intense mentoring service that would work on a long-term basis with young people – funding from South Australian Attorney-General's Department and the Australian Attorney-General's Department.
2002	Review and refocusing of service.
2003	<i>Panyappi</i> commences service in its current form. Coordinator, Lisa Kambouris appointed.
2004	Program evaluated by Kathleen Stacey & Associates – evidence that the program had significantly reduced offending behaviours in the target group and increased school retention.
2005	Funding cuts – a reduction in number of mentors able to work with young people.

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### ***Responding to an initiative by the state Attorney-General's Department***

*Panyappi* developed in response to a crime prevention initiative by the Crime Prevention Unit of the Attorney-General's department. It was identified that Aboriginal young people were frequenting the inner city and engaging in offending and other high-risk behaviours.

In 2000, the Crime Prevention Unit of the Attorney General's department and MAYFS (then known as MAYT) submitted a proposal for a 12-month mentoring program to work with the target group of young offenders, or those with high-risk behaviours.

### ***Identifying need to provide intense, long-term mentoring***

By 2001, after a year of operation, *Panyappi* identified its core business – to provide an intense, long-term mentoring service that would work closely with the target group and their families to intervene in pathways of offending and high-risk behaviours and provide young people with experiences and opportunities to develop a sense of competence, self-esteem, identity and direction.

Throughout 2001–02, *Panyappi* encountered teething problems with inter-agency collaboration, staffing and accommodation issues and funding cuts, which meant the program had to modify its service delivery scope.

### ***New program manager brought mentoring experience***

In 2003, *Panyappi* commenced service in its current form. The service moved to its current premises and the coordinator, Lisa Kambouris, was appointed. Lisa brought with her knowledge and experience of mentoring, program management skills and a vision of how she saw the program unfolding in the future.

**'It's about listening to the young people and their families, as change can only happen with willing participants. The program is based on action research, so I'm always doing research on mentoring, offending programs and ways of addressing 'at risk' behaviours. The evaluation was good in that I could also look at the negative areas of the program, which only assisted in making more positive changes.'**

Since 2003 the program has established itself in the sector as an effective, culturally appropriate crime prevention and mentoring service that gives purpose and direction to the most vulnerable Aboriginal young people and reduces offending and high-risk behaviours - a claim that is supported by evaluation findings.

# How to mentor Indigenous young people

## The *Panyappi* mentoring program for young people

Mentoring is a culturally appropriate way of working with young people and their families as it is compatible with the practice of older Indigenous people providing knowledge and guidance to younger people in the community. The mentoring role differs from other support service roles such as statutory or agency youth workers, social workers and counsellors in that the mentor builds a non-judgmental, trusting, friendly relationship with the young person and comes to be seen as being 'on the young person's side'.

### 1. *Gathering background information*

After a referral has been made to *Panyappi*, the coordinator responds by the next day, thereby addressing the immediate needs of the family. The first step in the mentoring process is to meet the young person and their family in order to understand what is going on in the young person's life that may have led to them to engage in offending or high-risk behaviour. Gaining the voluntary participation of the young person and their family in program participation means they will be more willing to work together.

'When I get a referral in, I then contact the family. We go out the next day and talk to families and see what's happening in the family and with the young person. It's all voluntary so they have to be willing to have a mentor, and so do the family, because you need them to work together... [We look] at what's happening for the child as well as the family. Why kids are going "uptown". There's usually something going on in the family as to why they're going up there.'

### 2. *Matching the family with a mentor*

After gathering background information, the coordinator gets an idea of the young person's and family's preferences and personalities in order to match them with a mentor.

'We then look at the things that the young person likes and the family likes so we can match them with the mentor... Then we have an introduction with a mentor.'

### 3. *Establishing rapport and fostering trust*

After the mentor and the young person have been introduced they start their relationship by engaging in recreational activities in order to get to know one another. The mentor encourages the young person to talk about what they like to do and what they are interested in. This lays the groundwork for building a trusting relationship and setting goals in the future.

'At first the mentor would start off with doing some rec. stuff, walks on beach to get to know the young person, just to get to know them, then yarning to see what they like to do... It's about being a friend at first... A bit further down the track they look at what goals they can make and set together.'

Important in building a trusting relationship is for the mentor to take a non-judgmental approach with the young person. It is important for the mentor to maintain clear role boundaries and not take the role of counsellor or social worker, which is more authoritarian in style and may discourage the young person from opening up.

'And something I put highly on my guys is... other centres want to provide counselling and anger management when they're in the car and stuff... I keep them very separated from people who are constantly telling them off because my mentor is going to be the person they're going to open up to.'

#### **4. Family-inclusive goal setting**

A family-inclusive approach is culturally appropriate and enables all members of the family to participate in goal setting with the young person. Clear, achievable goals give the young person and their families a sense of competence and efficacy when they are met, building resilience as well as modelling how to set and achieve goals.

‘The next step is just to keep working through the goals and working in conjunction with their families. Because unless you work with the families we’re only making a difference when they’re working with us and then they go back into their families. It’s about helping families to build resilience. And about empowering them so that they can have better lives.’

#### **5. Family-inclusive social activities**

The importance of including families in social activities is that it provides the young person and their family with a positive experience to share together, as well as providing them with the opportunity to share new experiences that ‘ordinary’ families engage in.

‘For instance the first time one of our guys took the family away they took them to a national park and bought lunch and the mother started crying on the way back and said [to the mentor], “That’s the first time we’ve been together as a whole family without being at a police station, in court or at a hospital.” ’

#### **6. Building a sense of identity and belonging**

Many of the young people who are referred to *Panyappi* have tentative connections with their cultural roots and may not have an ongoing connection with their extended kinship network. One of the most important tasks of the mentor is to reconnect young people to their culture by engaging them in cultural activities.

‘One of the things we have done is take the young people to the Aboriginal College as a lot of Elders go there to do courses or assist other community members with courses. They also yarn about the old days and story telling... The elders also taught the young people how to do cultural painting, artefact making, design, mosaics and stuff like that.’

Another significant cultural activity is working with young people to trace their family history and relatives. This valuable process strengthens a young person’s sense of identity and belonging by giving them an understanding of where they come from.

‘Doing the family tree gives them their spirit back. We’ll do little books with their family members and grandparents, etc., and we’ll pay for the photos (from the museum). And that makes a difference. The identity and belonging.’

Sometimes, when a young person has been removed from their family of origin, an important task is to link the young person back with their birth family.

‘One of the girls in our program, she’s been in a white family placement, highly middle class. She was 15 and had never seen her family. The first port of call we introduced her to her family in Darwin and she just ran. She loved it. We introduced her to her family down here and they were just crying. She’s there with her family and she’s got supports. She’s about to turn 18 now.’

Doing the family tree also benefits the family directly as many family members have often been disconnected from their cultural roots and communities. The activity strengthens family connections and gives the young person and their family a positive experience to share together.

‘And when we do cultural stuff we try to include the family because a lot of our mothers and fathers don’t know where their families are from. And when you start linking them up and they’re doing their family tree they get really excited and they then talk about that as a family too, it gives them conversation to talk about instead of going to court, or screaming at them because they’re running with this fellow and they’re doing this.’

## **7. Building a sense of competence and self-esteem**

An important part of *Panyappi*’s service is to provide the young person with opportunities to engage in new experiences and learn new skills. One way this is done is by linking the young person with programs run by other services so they can explore their potential and develop competence.

‘It’s providing them with the different things that we might do in our lives... We try to link them into things that [juvenile justice] are doing or other mainstream stuff that they can be linked in to.’

As young people gain new skills and knowledge they find a new direction in their lives and can participate in society in a way that is more productive and rewarding.

‘They’ve started a Boystown program here and they put our guys on at 15 and up. They help fix houses. Maintaining and painting and doing the trade stuff and they’re learning new skills and they get paid for it.’

## **8. Outcomes for young people**

When a young person engages with the mentoring program and takes advantage of the opportunities that are made available, they grow into more mature, confident individuals as they find a more rewarding direction in their lives than their past offending behaviour could provide. Some young people develop the maturity to contribute to *Panyappi* in a number of ways.

Some young people assist staff to run programs for new mentees.

‘With some of the kids who have now moved on, a maturity sets in, and so we’ve got a lot of our older kids now, especially when it comes to holiday program time, they usually help run them.’

Others are asked to provide input when hiring new mentors.

‘When I employ a mentor I usually have young people that we work with sit on the panel. Because they know who is going to work and who won’t.’

*Panyappi* is unique in that it is the only mentoring program designed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and to work with Indigenous young people in a culturally appropriate way.

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## **The young people and their mentors**

### ***The young people***

*Panyappi* works with young people from the age of 10 to 18 years, (they will follow the young person beyond 18 if needed). The program, which has a crime prevention focus, targets young people who frequent areas that place them at risk of becoming a victim of crime or engaging in offending or risk-taking behaviours. The early age of intervention means that *Panyappi* mentors can take a developmental approach to working with young people, intervening early to deter offending patterns, and ensuring better long-term outcomes for young people. The program is not time limited, so mentors work with the young person as long as they are needed.

Referrals for *Panyappi*’s services mostly come from the police and Families SA offices. The *Panyappi* team also provide a street-work service which includes transporting young people home and out of the inner city area. These

young people are then followed up by *Panyappi* staff. The young people who are referred to *Panyappi* are extremely vulnerable. The majority are involved with child protection or juvenile justice services.<sup>7</sup> Most have a history of offending or high-risk behaviours. Many have multiple, long-standing problems including family disruption, an offending history, disengagement from school, social and emotional issues, and substance misuse. Some have unsuccessfully been linked with other mainstream support services in the past, while others have had no support.

**‘We’ve got a lot of young people on our books that have never been part of the child protection system so we’ve got a lot of young people who have fallen through every net and nobody’s ever caught them.’**

Since *Panyappi* commenced service in its current form in March 2003, 260 young people have been referred to the program. There are currently 32 young people receiving mentoring services and four mentors employed by the service.

### **The mentors**

*Panyappi* employs mentors after they have completed accredited mentor training provided by *Panyappi*. Mentors take a formal, case-management approach to mentoring and receive ongoing supervision, support and access to professional development opportunities. The program is staffed by Indigenous workers.

Mentors build a positive, caring, trusting relationship with the young person by providing intensive, one-on-one engagement for up to 20 hours a week, depending on need. Mentors develop clear and achievable goals with the young person and their family, and the mentoring relationship is tailored to the young person’s interests and needs.

Mentors work with young people and their families not only in times of crisis, but also after the young person is doing well, to ensure their longer-term needs are met. This enables the mentors to take time to develop trust and address long-standing issues, which may reduce the likelihood that the young person will return to offending or ‘at risk’ behaviours.

Mentors promote positive relationships between the young person and their parents, family members, and others in the community. They also assist young people to link in with community services such as schools, training, counselling and recreational activities, as well as other Indigenous-specific services for young people offered by MAYFS such as tutoring.

Mentors act as role models for young people, modelling appropriate, non-offending behaviours and discouraging negative behaviours. Through the program’s activities, mentors also provide opportunities and activities for young people in which they can explore their potential and develop self-confidence.

Mentors support young people through any court processes and provide guidance, advice and advocacy. Mentors work with the young person in their own environment such as their home, schools, and other locations.

### **Evaluation of *Panyappi*’s services**

In 2004, the program was evaluated by an external organisation, Kathleen Stacey & Associates. The evaluation was the first Indigenous mentoring program to be evaluated nationally and internationally. The evaluation assessed the impact of the program after one year of operation. The evaluation found that, based on records from the state justice system’s database, there had been a decrease in the incidence of offending for almost all 14 of the young people involved in the program at that time. Twelve of the 14 young people had decreased their offending behaviour by 25 per cent or more, and most decreased their offending behaviour by 70 to 100 per cent. Two of the young people had increased their offending behaviour, one lived in a rural environment and could not engage with the program on a regular basis, and the other increased their offending behaviour early in their engagement with *Panyappi*, but had not offended since.

System data also reflected substantial decreases in formal cautions, orders, convictions and detentions, particularly if the young person had been engaged with *Panyappi* for six months or more.

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<sup>7</sup> Some information for the *Panyappi* profile is drawn from the *Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Program External Evaluation Report* prepared by Kathleen Stacey & Associates, 2004. The report is available from: [www.cpu.sa.gov/download/indig/pany-eval-june04.pdf](http://www.cpu.sa.gov/download/indig/pany-eval-june04.pdf)

The evaluation also found, from interview data, that many of the young people had reengaged with education and had a stronger sense of self-belief, and personal and cultural identity, had developed other interests, and had improved relationships with friends and family. Further, family members reported they had improved their communication skills with the young person and were more likely to respond constructively and feel that the young person was making positive changes in their lives, which also had a ripple effect within the family and extended family.

### ***Panyappi's future***

In late 2004, the South Australian Government Attorney General Department's funding agreement expired and was not renewed and the shortfall was not met by the state as planned. This has led to longer waiting lists for *Panyappi's* services.

'Because of lack of funding I've got huge waiting lists and we're put in a position of looking at the dollar value for our young people instead of just providing a service.'

Despite the funding cuts, the program is continuing to provide a service.

'We're doing it on a shoestring budget. I say we're doing it on a blackfella's budget. But at the end of the day we still provide a service to all these families.'

The information on *Panyappi* is an outline of the program. For more information contact Lisa Kambouris, *Panyappi* co-ordinator, Parks Community Centre, 2-46 Cowan Street, Angle Park, SA 5010. Telephone: (08) 8243 5733. Fax: (08) 8243 5744. Or go to their website at: [www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au](http://www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au).

# Marungbai

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## Leaving Care and After Care Service, Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Service, Taree, NSW

*Marungbai* is a leaving care and after care service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 15–25 years who are making, or who have made, the transition from out-of-home care to independent living. *Marungbai* is one of a range of support services run by the Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Service (GLMACS) in Taree, New South Wales, which is auspiced by Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre.

*Marungbai* is staffed by Indigenous workers and provides brokerage, support and referral services to Indigenous young people across central and northern New South Wales. Young people can access *Marungbai* by calling a toll-free number. *Marungbai* staff make referrals to other organisations for specific services such as counselling.

*Marungbai* also provides assistance through the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA). TILA is a one-off support payment by the Australian Government to assist young people aged 15–25 years who are leaving care to meet some of the expenses involved in making the transition to independent living. *Marungbai* assists young people to access TILA.

A goal of *Marungbai* is to ensure that young people leave care in a planned way and that they are supported in their transition to independence. Another goal of the service is to ensure that Indigenous young people establish and maintain links with their family and culture.

*Marungbai* can work with young people over the longer term to assist them with their ongoing support needs, or they can provide short-term assistance for young people with more immediate needs. Out-of-home care services in New South Wales are legally obliged to provide services to young people previously in their care up to the age of 25 years. *Marungbai* also offers services to Indigenous young people who may have been affiliated with another support service, but are not comfortable engaging with their past service provider.

*Marungbai* assists young people in their transition to independence by providing support with the following:

- Financial support to assist young people to purchase needed items such as furniture;
- Accessing and interpreting personal records such as their care history;
- Referrals to other services such as counselling;
- Advocacy;
- Health care;
- Housing;
- Further education;
- Employment;
- Legal issues.

## Getting *Marungbai* up and running

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1998	Program Director Amanda Bridge lodged an expression of interest with the NSW Department of Community Services to provide services.
January 1999	<i>Marungbai</i> commenced service throughout NSW. Ongoing consultations with a reference group to develop service to current standard.
June 2001	Review of services by the Department of Community Services in response to changes in the <i>Children and Young Person's Act</i> – <i>Marungbai</i> services revised to focus on leaving and after care in specific regions in NSW. <i>Marungbai</i> funded to expand the service to include more intense case management.
Mid-2006	Review and expansion of current services throughout a broader area of NSW.

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## ***Responding to an Expression of Interest***

In 1998, in response to a request for submissions in New South Wales by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) to provide services to young people leaving care, *Marungbai's* program director, Amanda Bridge, persuaded the service's board that they should submit an expression of interest. *Marungbai* was successful in winning the contract.

'When we established the service we based in on an Expression Of Interest and we just answered that process. The department said, "That's the target group. This is what we want." We sat down and brainstormed... around how I could see that working.'

The program director believes that Indigenous organisations are disadvantaged by the tendering process as the short time frame in which submissions must be responded to does not allow for full community consultation in the initial stage.

'Out comes the expression of interest [in the newspaper] and... we might have a week or something [to respond]. The way [Indigenous] processes are, they are a lot slower and more reflective... In order to develop proposals or services that are appropriate to us we should be consulting before we even write it, but that doesn't happen [because] the processes don't allow it to happen.'

## ***Setting up a reference group***

Despite the short time frame for submitting a proposal, *Marungbai* secured funding to establish the service. They then set up a reference group to provide advice on the best way to establish and deliver services to young people and develop appropriate policy and procedures around this.

'We set up a reference group and involved the funding bodies, the Chief Executive Officer of a peak body, a board member from our line of management, a person from one of the other big leaving and after care services... It was making sure we were clear and focused on getting the program up and running and [ensuring] the quality was really good about setting up the processes, the referrals, the policy stuff. At the time it was really good. But if I had it to do again it's always good to have a reference group of community members so you're picking up your culture. It was a mixture: mainstream and a couple of Indigenous people in there... It was community-focused but I would have done that a bit more.'

## ***Hiring the right staff***

After funding for the program was secured, *Marungbai* gave serious consideration to hiring staff with the skills and experience to fulfil the requirements of the position.

They first hired a non-Indigenous, skilled worker on a short-term basis with specific experience in establishing new programs. The project worker conducted community consultations to determine what kind of service the community wanted, how people would best access the service, and the most effective way to disseminate information about the service to local communities. *Marungbai* staff also attended community events throughout the state to promote the program to local communities. Establishing the project took approximately six months.

Once the service was established, *Marungbai* hired an Indigenous project officer on a longer-term basis to work with clients. The role required knowledge of key areas such as the legal processes and rights affecting young people, knowledge of departmental contractual agreements and the ability to negotiate with senior officials to ensure the best outcomes for the service and the young people.

'We needed to recruit the right person – someone who had current skills, not a trainee, who could do the job. It was a long process.'



## ***Building collaboration between organisations***

A strength of *Marungbai* is the network of relationships they have built with other Indigenous organisations, particularly in regional centres, where they refer young people for further support. Staff at *Marungbai* have developed strong relationships with placement organisations and government departments by visiting Community Service Centres and non-government organisations across the state to promote *Marungbai* and encourage professionals to refer Indigenous young people who are about to leave state care.

‘We went out and met with all the area managers at one stage to let them know that they should be accessing the service. That’s part of what we do with our networking, we’ll go out to all the Community Service Centres and do our networking and promote *Marungbai* to the agencies and encourage them to make referrals when their clients are leaving care.’

## **Supporting young people leaving care**

### ***Referrals***

*Marungbai* receives referrals from the Department of Community Services, carers, general services, Transit to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) staff, and Juvenile Justice.

When *Marungbai* receives a referral, staff respond the same day. *Marungbai* staff first confirm that the young person has a care history, one of the criteria for becoming a client of the service. *Marungbai* staff also confirm whether the young person has a leaving care plan and whether a cultural component is included in their care plan, in order to determine what kind of services would best assist the young person.

‘One of the things [we do] when someone refers is to ring up the local department and make sure they have a care history. We’ll call on our contacts who we know will help and they’ll then get onto the computer and give us the information.’

However, many of the referrals to the service come from young people themselves, who call *Marungbai* wanting support or information.

### ***Advocacy***

An important service *Marungbai* provides is to advocate on a young person’s behalf to obtain information or support. *Marungbai* staff are skilled in dealing with departmental officers and representatives from legal, educational, employment and housing organisations, and will ensure the young person gets the support they need in accordance with their rights.

‘If a young person comes to us at 19, they left care at 18 and they didn’t get any support when they left care, and they’re not getting the support when they ask for it, they’ll get *Marungbai* to advocate on their behalf. And generally things will happen pretty quickly once we get involved.’

In particular, staff are often asked to advocate on a young person’s behalf when they want access to information about their care history.

‘Another thing they will often ask us to do is to read their files. If they want to access their file. We find it will often happen around the 21–25 year bracket. They want to have a look at their file and we’ll make a request to the department to get a file released to *Marungbai*. Sometimes they don’t want to have anything to do with [the department], so we get their file released to us and they’re able to go through their file. [The department] still takes their siblings’ names out of the file; they black it all out. If you’ve got half-siblings they’re not allowed to access that information. They might not even know they’ve got siblings [until they get their file] and then it’s blacked out. Under FOI they should be able to access that information. That means that people like us have to be really on the ball and make sure we

access the information as it comes through. That way, when they get access to their file there are no surprises.'

### ***Maintaining the young person's connection with community and culture***

Staff at *Marungbai* prioritises the importance of maintaining the young person's connection with their family, community and culture. Departmental staff often contact *Marungbai* to ask them for cultural advice or to facilitate a young person's connection with family or community members.

'We emphasise the importance of remaining connected to family and community. That's something [the department] often relies on us for. To give them some support strategies around preparing them to leave care – the cultural aspects of that. They see us as a support for that young person up until they're 25 in the cultural area, on a needs basis... '

### ***Responsiveness to client's needs***

*Marungbai* receives requests for support in a range of areas. The service is valued by young people for its willingness to respond where possible to all requests for assistance to meet the young person's needs.

'We work outside of the box. We do what we have to do. We get family law and everything in here, and you can't fob them off. You at least have to make a phone call.'

A strength of *Marungbai* is its timely responsiveness to clients' requests. Staff respond as soon as possible so that the young person's needs are met when they arise.

'One of the things that comes from the clients is that the brokerage happens within 2 – 3 weeks, rather than [them] having to wait for months when they go through the department. We respond straight away, if they put an order in for a bed, we get that within a couple of weeks. And we can meet those needs. '

A current shortfall of the service *Marungbai* provides to young people is an inability to provide semi-supported transitional housing to help the young person ease into the responsibilities of living independently. This is because *Marungbai* does not have the resources to provide housing options for young people.

'The majority of clients want assistance with housing and we don't have control over that. You can write support letters but it's a hard one. [There's a] gap when they're going to the next level... so there's also a place for semi-supported independent accommodation where they can learn how to pay rent, budgeting, learn how to cook, etc. If we had the housing we could do it. A boarding house with a youth worker on board would be excellent.'

### ***Young people stay in touch***

Young people rely on *Marungbai* as a point of contact after they have established themselves in an independent living environment. After they no longer need support, young people will continue to ring staff to touch base.

'Quite often when they're getting to 24, 25, there not ringing for support as much, but they're ringing to have a chat, to let us know where they're up to. We're the person that's always there for them.'

Staff believe that evidence of the service's effectiveness is in the number of young people who access the service, and the lack of complaints received by clients through *Marungbai's* formal complaints avenue.

For more information on *Marungbai*, contact Glen Rennie or Katharin Bartley at Great Lakes Manning Aboriginal Children's Services, 140 Victoria Street Taree, NSW 2430. PO Box 616, Taree, NSW 2430. Telephone: (02) 6551 2088.

## Conclusion

Comprehensive support for carers enhances both their satisfaction in their caring role and their capacity to provide good quality placements for the children in their care. Programs that offer practical and emotional support, as well as assistance in dealing with child protection departments, help carers feel more confident and empowered in their caring role. Carers also feel supported when the children in their care receive the support services they need.

Children and young people in care need a range of supports as they have often experienced harm and trauma, which has led them to be placed in out-of-home care. Services that keep children and young people connected with their families and communities, enhance their self-esteem and cultural identity, and provide practical supports when they make the transition to independent living, are likely to improve outcomes for children in care.



