

# KINSHIP CARE AND THE EXPERIENCES OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CARERS IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

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# Overview

- Context – history of AICCAS
- Child Protection in Queensland
- Study Design, sample, interviews, analysis, results
- Discussion
  - importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relative care



# Context - History of AICCAS

- Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies were established in 1970s
- Main purpose – preventing the ongoing removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by state welfare authorities and their placement with non-Indigenous families
- AICCAS – maintained identity and links to family, culture and community



# Over-representation

- Aboriginal children six times more likely than non-indigenous children to be on child protection orders
- Legacy of past policies of the forced removal
- Intergenerational effects of previous separations from family & culture
- Poor socioeconomic status
- Cultural differences in child-rearing practices



# Child Protection in Queensland






## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in system

- a. 1,340 children subject to substantiations (13% of all children) (AIHW 2006);
- b. 1,667 children on care and child protection orders (26% of all children) (AIHW 2006);
- c. Adherence to the Child Placement Principle continues to fall from 66% in 2005-6 to 62% in 2007
- d. Out of 1,496 children in out of home care, 566 children are not placed with their family or community (AIHW 2006)



# Child Protection in Queensland

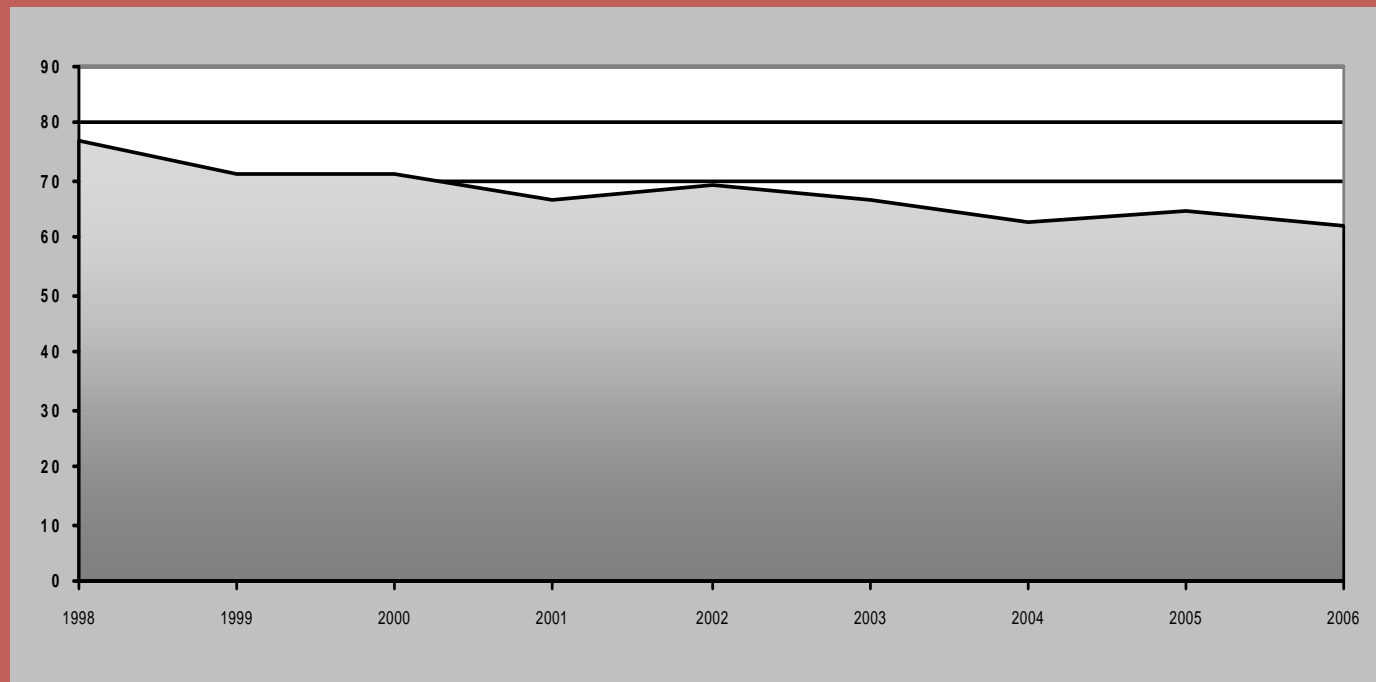
## Placement Data

 Foster Care	- 1,214 children
 Relative Care	- <b>632 children</b>
 Residential	- 114 children
 Home based	- 67 children
 Independently living	- 84 children



# Child Protection in Queensland

## Adherence to the Child Placement Principle



# Why research support needs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers?

- Very little research in this area, specifically Indigenous carers
- Voice to Indigenous carers – service to govt and community
- According to SCRCSSP, 2005 - high use of kinship/relative care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Increased numbers equates to a critical need for further work around exploring relative care options





# Regulation of out of home care

- Regulation of out of home care in Australia – increasingly formalised
- Now includes extensive checks of criminal history charges + traffic, domestic violence, cp history, assessment of carer + family, charters of carer rights & responsibilities, licensing for non-govt agencies that recruit, train and support carers (Tilbury 2007)
- Need special attention to relative/kinship care



# Impact on Relative/Kinship Carers

- Emphasis on regulation care is not matched by increased attention to support for relative carers
- Generally relative carers do not receive as much support as other foster carers
- Carer support can enhance placement quality



# Research Aim

- Quality placements require improved support needs for carers to ensure:
  - stable and safe home life
  - improved health and wellbeing
  - bolster extended family connections
  - foster positive pathways to develop their potential in life
  - potential to recruit and retain carers
- Reasons to regulate care – should be for quality placement



# Methodology

■ Qualitative data has been collected through semi-structured interviews around:

- motivations to become a carer,
- pathways to becoming a carer, their training and support needs,
- Contact with government departmental staff as well as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognised Agency,
- Relationships with birth parents and needs of the child for whom they are caring for



# Sample

- Sample: mix of 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relative and non-relative carers and 6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers from the Indigenous Recognised Agencies
- Criteria of minimum 6 months experience



# Results

## Four main themes

- practical support (financial assistance, respite care)
- enabling support (help with navigating system, advice on various topics, personal contact with worker)
- want the dept to care about children
- opinions listened and respected and departmental workers to have an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



# Practical Support

## Carers said:

- The department officers talk a lot but no action
- The annoying part is that the caseworker has changed many times and every time I ring the Dept, I have to tell them the whole history again
- A lot of paperwork that we don't have time for – it's not worth it and it should be made a lot easier
- We just pay it and the Dept says “oh we'll reimburse you”. I don't trust them. They say they do this and do that and they don't.
- It is frustrating that sometimes, they just let things lapse. If you don't push it, and you don't ask, then you don't know what rights and responsibilities you have



# Some did get help they requested

- Yeah they helped – They provided us with, we got the boys double bunks and a cupboard
- Just regular contact – I mean, things started happening when I had that regular contact with someone from the Dept





# Enabling Support

- Some specialist, that's what I want. So I can sit down and talk to someone, somebody who's a professional who can help
- Like if the boys were having a problem at school and you would ring someone and say, "this is happening, what do you think we should do? And not hear, "oh, all boys are handfuls"
- Like we've had issues with (child) where he's been a handful for the daycare and she said, you know, it's a struggle, She (statutory worker) has never come out and said "let's talk about it"



# Care about children

- Worker: The dept is making decisions about the kids in care and the carers want to see that the dept really care about the children
- From my point of view just to make sure, all right they checked me out and all that sort of stuff, but I'd still like to see them to come and see for themselves how the kids are doing...I'd like to see, you know, a couple of more of the departmental people coming out and seeing the children and see how they're doing



# Two carers wanted little contact with the department

- I don't want them in my face or in the children's face when it is not necessary. I want those children to feel as comfortable and as normal as they can ever feel
- To be quite honest the less I have to do with the department the better I like it



# Respect

- Culture, upbringing is different. It sort of upset me in a way that we had to get permission if we took her out of town or if we went to a family funeral or a wedding that's outside of town where we would just make a 1st minute decision. European ways you have to get all papers legalised and documents
- You try to talk to them on the phone and they talk cheeky back to you. I won't tolerate that, I've done nothing wrong, so I'll talk straight back at them
- I think they need to have a nicer approach, they need to be mature and treat us as human being and not names and numbers



# Motivation

- We are not actually fostering we are just taking family
- Well I always cared for these two little ones before they went into care.....like I would give their mother a break all the time
- For the children, we're family. We're family, that's where they should be
- I didn't want him to end up what happened to his other brothers and sisters (they were fostered to different families) because their lives are mixed up and.....I didn't want him to go through that...I want him to have a good future



# Limitations

- Despite limitations, this study adds to the knowledge base about carer support and Indigenous perspectives on the child welfare system
- Highlights a number of issues that have implications for policy and practice



# Preliminary insights

- Suggests further need for more engagement between statutory workers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers
- Important to ensure placement settings are well supported
- Better understanding of the cultural child-rearing practices of both cultures



# Conclusion

- Governments must listen to communities, specifically Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to develop, design and implement strategies that have strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input around culturally appropriate services in child protection matters.
- The changes must promote a healthy start for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at risk of abuse and neglect, as well as contribute to overall improved health & well-being - that is equal to non-Indigenous people of Australia.
- Furthermore, positive changes would contribute to the important aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families becoming empowered to rebuild and maintain control over their family life.





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