

Good Practice in Child & Family Welfare Services for Aboriginal Children, Young People and Families

Karen Scobell, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne
Les Corlett, Berry Street Victoria

Background to the Monograph

- How to improve quality practice in child and family welfare services for Aboriginal families and children
- What is a “culturally competent” organisation?
- Examples of good practice drawn from amongst the Centre’s 95 member organisations
- Mainstream orgs will continue to provide services to Aboriginal children and families: services must be high quality, culturally sensitive
- A long way to go, but willingness to engage, discuss, and share ideas about how to move forward



The Six Case Studies

- **Anglicare's** Family Support Innovations Project.
- **Berry Street Victoria's** TAKE TWO program.
- **Eastern Access Community Health's** (EACH) Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP).
- **Kildonan Child and Family Services'** implementation of the Families and School Together (FAST) Program.
- **Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative's** (GEGAC) Koori Kare.
- **MacKillop Family Services'** journey through organisational change.



Anglicare's Family Support Innovations Project

- Anglicare (Yarra Ranges) partnering with Indigenous Health Team (Yarra Valley Community Health Service)
- Innovations Projects: meet the needs of families notified to Child Protection by diverting them to community-based services, and minimise renotification
- Describes processes undertaken to:
 - ✓ engage with, and win the trust of, vulnerable Aboriginal families in the Yarra Ranges community,
 - ✓ foster the partnerships to support and progress this work, and
 - ✓ achieve the successful outcomes resulting to date.

Innovations Project: Outcomes

- At various levels:
 - ✓ family and Community,
 - ✓ the member organisations, and
 - ✓ partnership development
- Anglicare and Indigenous Health Team view the Project as a means to improve dialogue and understanding between both orgs in all areas of providing care services for Aboriginal children, youth and families.



Berry Street Victoria

- BSV's journey towards providing culturally appropriate and effective services to Aboriginal children and young people, in particular those referred to TAKE TWO
- TAKE TWO: Therapeutic service to support children with complex emotional and behavioural issues resulting from severe abuse or neglect
- Systemic change at organisational and program levels over past 3 years to ensure services and programs are culturally sensitive and meet the needs of Aboriginal children and young people
- Aboriginal Senior Clinician role

Berry Street: outcomes

- Aboriginal Senior Clinician role:
 - ✓ highlighting and advocating around areas for improvement,
 - ✓ assisting BSV to address systemic problems and move towards being a culturally sensitive and competent organisation,
 - ✓ advocating for good practice service delivery to Aboriginal clients, and
 - ✓ the education and capacity building of non-Aboriginal clinicians.
- Policies, procedures, systems and tools must be developed to support culturally sensitive practice. Cultural awareness training is required to break down attitudes and assist staff and carers to improve the way they do things.

EACH's Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program

- Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) partnering with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, and KECFO (Government funded).
- IESIP: (1) foster improved understanding amongst kindergartens of the importance of developing culturally sensitive practice to engage Aboriginal families and children in the pre-school system, and
(2) ensure successful, and mutually beneficial partnerships within local area



IESIP: Outcomes

- Collaboration: EACH strengthens its links to, and understanding of, the Aboriginal Community, and Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place is supported in building capacity
- KECFO works effectively within the Aboriginal community to build relationships, thus building family and Community capacity.
- Improved capacity for effecting a change of attitude and practice within the kindergarten sector towards Aboriginal families,
- Development of a vehicle to improve understanding within the Aboriginal Community of the benefits of pre-school for their children, via the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place play group
- Strengthening the links, and support of organisational capacity through sharing Community knowledge and organisational resources between EACH and the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place.

Aboriginal FAST Program

- Families and Schools Together (FAST) program: 8-week, early intervention and prevention program:
 - ✓ strengthen family functioning,
 - ✓ prevent a child's school failure,
 - ✓ prevent substance abuse by the child and family members, and
 - ✓ reduce parental and child stress in daily life situations.
- Partnership between Kildonan Child and Family Services, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), Thornbury Primary School.
- Thornbury Primary School identified children between 5 and 9 y.o. with behavioural/learning difficulties considered remediable. Seven families agreed to take part, all seven completed the program.

FAST Program: outcomes

- Vastly improved levels of engagement between those families involved in the FAST program and the school.
- Strong supportive connections developed between families participating in FAST.
- Involvement in the FAST program has boosted the confidence of Aboriginal workers involved in delivering FAST.
- Three diverse partners have pooled their expertise for a common goal: the collaboration between Kildonan, VACCA and Thornbury Primary School presented challenges, but ultimately successful due commitment to working towards positive outcomes for Aboriginal children at risk of school failure.

Koori Kare Program - Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-op

- Aboriginal specific foster care program operating across the Gippsland region.
- Funded by DHS to provide out-of-home care for up to 14 children. A 24 / 7 service, placing Aboriginal children experiencing crisis or emergency; or for a short, medium or long term placement.
- Carers recruited largely through word of mouth, based on Koori Kare's reputation.
- GEGAC's knowledge of local community - can place children either with appropriate family members, or with trained and accredited carers who have the skills to provide culturally appropriate care and meet the needs of Aboriginal children.

Koori Kare: Outcomes

- All Koori Kare children have a Cultural Plan incl. a genogram, an outline of who they are safe to be connected with (family and Community) and local cultural activities they should be included in.
- Carers are not left to maintain and strengthen family, Community and cultural linkages on their own. Koori Kare provides practical advice and ongoing support
- Caring for Aboriginal children has unique elements: these should be acknowledged, with strategies in place to support Aboriginal children and their carers. An essential ingredient is maintaining and strengthening links to Aboriginal children's family, Community and culture while in out-of-home care.

MacKillop Family Services: a journey through organisational change.

- Partnership between MacKillop, Wathaurang Aboriginal Cooperative, Western Suburbs Indigenous Gathering Place, and VACCA.
- Purpose: to improve services for Aboriginal children, young people and families in Melbourne's North West and Southern Suburbs and Geelong.
- Establishment of Indigenous Issues Steering Committee – a forum for discussion, sharing and learning, built around the 4-way partnership.
- Employment of Aboriginal Liaison Worker - responsible for supporting MacKillop's partnership with the three ACCOs, and driving practice and attitudinal change amongst staff and carers.

MacKillop's journey: the outcomes

- Aboriginal Liaison Worker has developed two key resources to support service delivery and practice change within MacKillop:
 - ✓ Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Manual,
 - ✓ Aboriginal Resource Information Kit.
- MacKillop has seen a range of benefits and positive outcomes from the establishment of the Indigenous Issues Steering Committee and the Aboriginal Liaison Worker role:
 - ✓ Strong relationships.
 - ✓ Increased knowledge and understanding by staff and carers.
 - ✓ Improved services and practice.
 - ✓ Better outcomes for Indigenous children, young people and families.

Key Themes

- **Organisational commitment and leadership** is essential in moving towards culturally appropriate services and better outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- Community service organisations must **develop partnerships** with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and/or the local Aboriginal Community
- Culturally appropriate and sensitive services require **new and different models of care** and changes in practice.
- **Culturally competent organisations** are staffed by trained staff including Aboriginal workers with a sound understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions, child rearing practices; they have in place culturally sensitive policies, procedures, practices and systems, and put into practice regular review mechanisms and continuous improvement strategies.

The Future

Much remains to be done.

- Collaboratively scope and define “cultural competence”
- Support non-Aboriginal sector to increase awareness and understanding, gather useful data, implement programs -> achieve cultural competence
- Implement training to build organisational competence and workforce capacity
- Undertake action research projects: showcase effective models of care and practice for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Contact details

Karen Scobell

Senior Officer

Membership & Strategic Projects

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Ph: (03) 9614 1577

Email: karen.scobell@cwav.asn.au

Les Corlett

Aboriginal Senior Clinician

“TAKE TWO” Program

Berry Street Victoria

Ph: (03) 9429 9266

Email: licorlett@berrystreet.org.au