

WAMINDA – SOUTH COAST WOMEN’S HEALTH AND WELFARE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Nabu Aboriginal family preservation and restoration program





Doing It Our Way – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led early intervention program

From 2020 to 2021, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children identified good practices of early intervention and family support programs that are being delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across the nation.

This is one of 11 profiles that demonstrates how community-controlled organisations are achieving positive results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, including supporting these children to be kept safe from harm, uphold their right to grow up within their own family and community, and access critical health and early education services.

Waminda – South Coast Women’s Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation

Nabu Aboriginal family preservation and restoration program

South Coast, New South Wales

ACRONYMS

DCJ Department of Communities and Justice (NSW)

www.snaicc.org.au

OVERVIEW

Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation in New South Wales is a model for Closing the Gap, as recognised in 2017 by the Minister for Indigenous Health, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP.¹ For nearly 40 years, this Aboriginal women's-led organisation has worked to address the social determinants of local Aboriginal² communities' health, provide a centre of excellence for Aboriginal women's healthcare, and be a leader in linking culture with education, health and wellbeing. Through a range of culturally safe and holistic programs and services, Waminda provides local women and their Aboriginal families with an opportunity to build a sense of belonging to the community while receiving quality health and wellbeing support.

Within its suite of programs is the Nabu Aboriginal family preservation and restoration program; developed in 2018 in response to the high rates of Aboriginal children being removed from their families. This program provides culturally grounded, strengths-based wraparound support to women and their Aboriginal families who are exposed to the state's child protection system. Local solutions

and contextualised activities are used to engage and strengthen participating families and achieve the best outcomes for all involved. Its design, leadership and delivery align to the cultural values and perspectives of the local communities across the Shoalhaven and Illawarra regions of New South Wales, with the program being informed by the Waminda Model of Care and the Balaang Healing Framework.

The success of the Nabu program is due to a holistic team approach within the context of an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation that places culture and community at its foundation. The program is constantly adjusting to the changing landscape of the child protection system, while promoting local and broader systemic changes through advocacy, research and strong leadership at all levels of service delivery. Waminda brings a cultural lens to its collaborative work with child protection systems and, in turn, the Nabu program is proving to significantly change families' experiences of the child protection system and the system's experience of Aboriginal families.



"We're teaching these girls, we're giving them guidance, we're nurturing them, we're just showing them how to live in this world and how to survive"

Staff member

ORGANISATION

Waminda is an Aboriginal community-controlled health service, established in 1983 by Aboriginal women from the area. It started out as a centre that would meet the actual needs of Aboriginal women and their families in a culturally appropriate manner and fill the gap created by mainstream health services that often lack cultural understanding.

In the early 1990s, the centre transitioned to Waminda and, along with tailored holistic healthcare, it now endeavours to support local women to “lead and live self-determined futures”. Its vision is that “women and their Aboriginal families are positive, happy and healthy” and the organisation takes an active role in influencing mainstream services to be more culturally sensitive and create improved access for Aboriginal people.³

With culture and family at the centre of everything that the organisation does, Waminda is guided by the six values of culture, respect, boldness, accountability, collaboration and leadership. This includes privileging Aboriginal voices, respecting Elders as leaders and knowledge holders, disrupting systems of oppression and racism with courage, honouring ancestors, and privileging Aboriginal leadership.

Waminda operates with the understanding that Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations “are 23% better at attracting and retaining Aboriginal clients than mainstream providers”, that the organisation’s “cost benefit per dollar spend is \$1.19”, and that “the lifetime health impact of interventions delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled health services is 50% greater than with mainstream health services”.⁴ With all revenue re-invested into this community-controlled service, Waminda’s model of care “is so important to community – we make a lifelong impact on community members and their families”.⁵

As both a significant achievement and statement, Waminda is the largest employer of Aboriginal women in the New South Wales community sector. All seven members of the board are local Aboriginal women and the majority of its more than 100 staff members are Aboriginal, including most members of the executive management team.

“Waminda is the community, and the community is Waminda”

Staff member

The organisation understands itself to be of and for the Aboriginal community, crediting much of its success on its continuing accountability to this community. This commitment has resulted in Waminda establishing a strong, positive and trusted local reputation, which in turn increases demand for its services and improves engagement of people who often are hesitant to engage with health services and supports.

Both the Waminda Women’s Elders group and the Waminda Cultural Committee play a significant role in the direction of the organisation. The committee, in particular, guides and informs all organisational practices and protocols, shoulders the responsibility of Waminda’s cultural integrity and ensures that the organisation remains grounded, strong and community driven. Committee members include Elders and staff who represent each local community and the different local families. They ensure that Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing are embedded in the organisation’s approach. When the committee comes together, members share the cultural family knowledge that has been passed down through the generations, which in turn informs Waminda’s cultural framework, *Wiyanga Yanaga*.

Waminda’s non-Koori staff are included through the Waminda Imperfect Allies group and by participating in cultural inductions and cultural mentoring. These staff members are supported in their roles through culturally focused resources, regular supervision, professional development, and the Imperfect Allies sessions. The sessions offer a space in which to sit with other non-Aboriginal staff to unpack white privilege, engage in raw and honest reflections about working with Aboriginal communities, and understand and challenge white privilege and dominant oppressive paradigms. The organisation considers that it crucial for non-Koori staff to “confront this uncomfortable but necessary space”,⁶ particularly while working in a Koori organisation.

Along with the Nabu program, Waminda delivers a range of holistic services that cover:

- **Gadhu Balaang Biyani primary and clinical care services** – providing women with access to general practitioners, registered nurses, midwives, and Aboriginal health workers as well as health checks, chronic disease care plans, immunisation programs, mammogram programs, podiatry, physiotherapy, hearing assessments etc.
- **Minga Gudjaga ‘Mother and Baby’ maternity services** – provides holistic midwifery care within a safe and nurturing environment so that women can make informed decisions about their pregnancies.⁷
- **Balaang healing space and services** – giving local women a culturally safe place where they can heal and grow, not only in challenging moments but in moments of celebration, “where we continue to practice our culture”.⁸

“When community women are accessing or visiting this space, they feel the ancient connection and belonging of the Country where they can take the time to stop, reconnect and heal”

Annual Report 2019-20

- **Case management services** – provides specialised and expert support and advocacy, both within and external to Waminda, for Aboriginal families who are facing a range of challenges in their lives. These challenges often are the result of grief and loss, homelessness, domestic and family violence, alcohol and substance use, and social and emotional wellbeing. Using a strengths-based approach that aims to support the social and emotional wellbeing of families in a culturally safe way, the team delivers holistic seamless wraparound support for women and their families.
- **Dead or Deadly Aboriginal women’s health and wellbeing program** – a holistic relationship-based model health promotion initiative designed by and for Aboriginal women in the Shoalhaven region. The program is intended to build their strength and resilience, helping them achieve healthy lifestyle changes and strengthened communities. It also aims to grow support networks, facilitate pathways to Waminda’s other health and clinical services, and provide opportunities for these services to support these women.

- **Bulwul Balaang** – a culturally safe space for young Koori women to gather and take part in activities that cover culture, yarning, nutrition, life skills and gym, as well as outreach, mentoring and drop-in services. The in-school program provides information sessions regarding sexual health, health checks, healthy relationships and lifestyles, relationship building, cultural identity and peer relationships in schools.
- **Comprehensive cancer and palliative care services** – includes cancer prevention, screening and early detection, diagnosis, treatment and support services in addition to individualised palliative care support. Both programs are delivered through a culturally informed and culturally driven framework to meet patient and community needs.
- **Waranj Dhurawaraga – Growing Strong Together NDIS support** – offering NDIS support coordination and ongoing services.
- **Kareela Ngura ‘Country of trees and water’ Terara site** – a sustainable permaculture and bush tucker rural industry project that brings permaculture and local Aboriginal knowledge and practices into one community hub.
- **Supported Employment and Leadership program** – a structured employment program that provides Aboriginal women who previously may not have been employed or received formal training with opportunities to access entry level positions.
- **Pamper days** – a soft entry point for women to access culturally appropriate clinical care and services.

“Pamper day is wonderful and gives us all a chance to get together, catch up and have health checks in a natural environment”

Program participant

Waminda also offers women Elders groups, yarning circles, women’s groups and gatherings; health promotion and prevention services and events; social enterprise development; and cultural immersion and decolonisation workshops.

KEY ELEMENT OF SUCCESS: WAMINDA'S MODEL OF CARE AND THE BALAANG HEALING FRAMEWORK

*Strong women. Strong Community.
Strong Culture.*

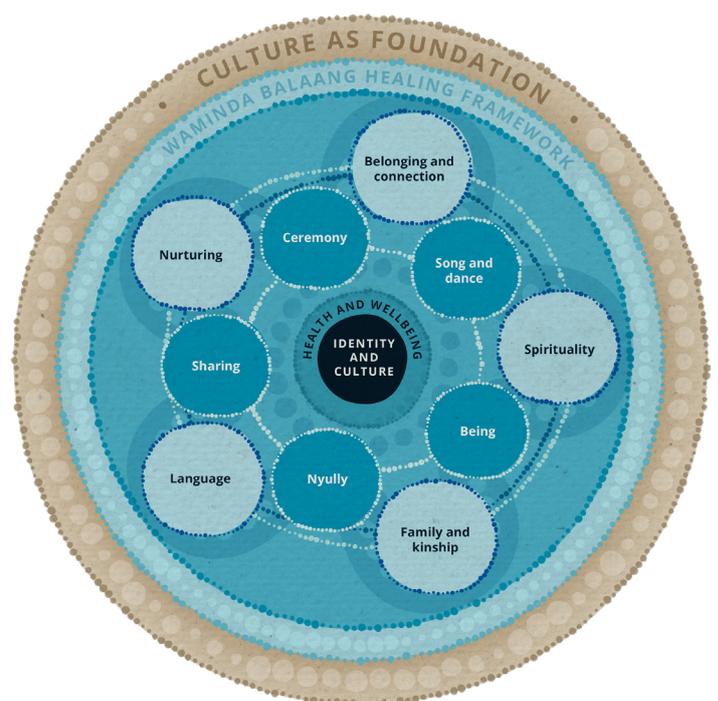
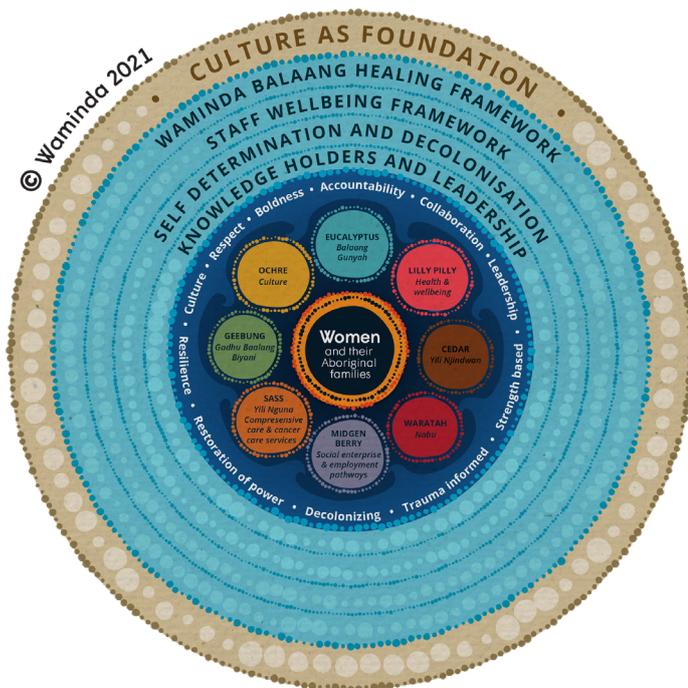
Waminda motto

All activities at Waminda, including the Nabu program, are guided by the Waminda Model of Care and the Balaang Healing Framework, which place women and their Aboriginal families at the very centre of all services and programs. These models have been developed over Waminda's 37-year period, with input from Elders, community members, the Waminda Cultural Committee and other staff.

They reflect Waminda's values and commitment to a strengths-based holistic approach that is culturally grounded and informed by an understanding of the impact of intergenerational trauma. Both articulate the significance of culture and its contribution to healing, community strength and resilience, research and evidence, and engagement and partnerships.

With women and their Aboriginal families at the centre, Waminda's programs wrap around to offer each woman an integrated and coordinated pathway of care, depending on the needs and circumstances of the individual woman and her family. The series of concentric circles surrounding each woman (see figures below) represent the important values, principles, practices, Elders and community leaders that support the model, while also focusing on the whole person and their social and emotional wellbeing. The outer layer of the model establishes culture as foundation. This is both the heart and strength of the model – embedding Waminda's cultural practices and protocols throughout the whole service.

The second last outer circle of the model is the Waminda Balaang Healing Framework. When a woman comes into the service, the staff know that she is on her own journey and they know that they can walk beside her and support her, holding that space for her to connect to identity, culture and community on her own. This framework supports each woman to recognise and heal through her own connection to culture; spirituality; family and kinship; community; language and culture; identity; hope; remembering; trust and safety; and health and wellbeing.



THE NABU PROGRAM

"She's the nurturer, the protector, she gives you guidance, she's got so much culture, she's the holder of all the stories, she holds the whole family together – so this is exactly what Nabu is"

Staff member⁹

The Nabu program is named after the local Aboriginal word for 'grandmother'. Reflecting all Waminda programs, it was born from the professional and lived experience of Waminda staff, local Elders and community members. The program is led and delivered by Aboriginal staff and aligns to the cultural values and perspectives of the local community.

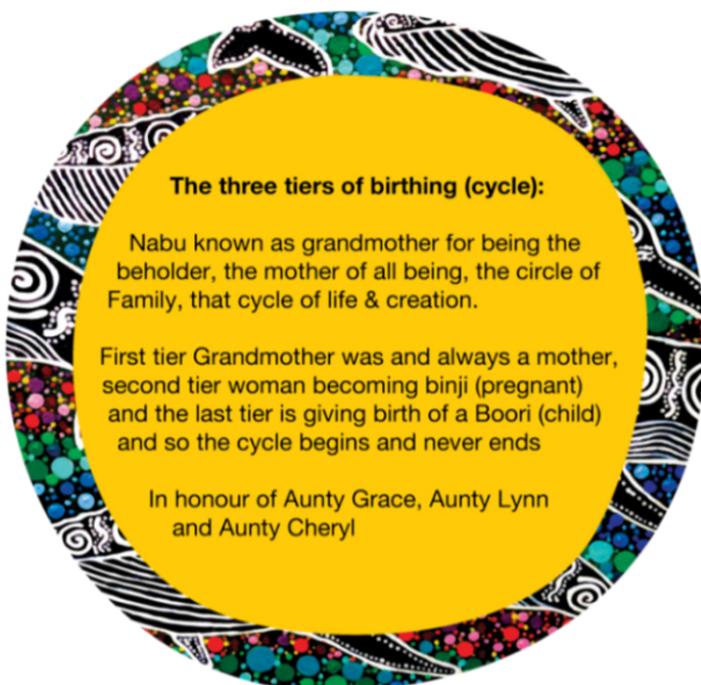
Nabu evolved in direct response to communities' concerns that too many Aboriginal children were being removed from their families into out-of-home care and not being returned home. The program is designed to ensure that either Aboriginal children and young people remain safe and well cared for within their family (preservation) or that Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care return safely home wherever possible (restoration).

Another of its primary aims is to promote local and broader systemic changes through advocacy, research, strong leadership at all levels of service delivery, and by working both with families and the New South Wales Government's Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). The program recognises that many families need support to navigate government systems, which are difficult to understand and often involve a power imbalance that works against Aboriginal families.

To date, 87 families have received support through the Nabu program. Of the 292 children supported within these families, 160 children have stayed with their families, 11 children have been reunited ('restored') with their families, and eight have been removed.

| FAMILIES RECEIVING /RECEIVED SUPPORT | | 87 |
|--|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Family members supported | Total # of people | 436 |
| | Adults | 144 |
| | Children and young people | 292 |
| Of the 292 children and young people: | In Preservation & Restoration process | 113 |
| | Preserved | 160 |
| | Restored | 11 |
| | Removed | 8 |

The program model recognises that a family will need intensive wraparound supports at different times across their engagement with the program, and interventionist top-down service approaches should be avoided where possible and kept to a minimum where not possible. Guided by the Waminda Model of Care and the Balaang Healing Framework, the team uses a flexible all-of-life approach to support families over an 18-month period. This approach helps families to build up their agency in and control over life decisions; increase their self-sufficiency and resilience; learn how to provide a safe and enriching environment for their children; develop their parenting and communication skills; and strengthen their connections to culture. The team is guided by the wisdom of local Elders, and culturally grounded activities are delivered by Elders, cultural mentors, program support workers, counsellors, caseworkers and managers.



FAMILY-LED: RESPONDING TO THE HOLISTIC NEEDS OF FAMILIES

Family buy-in and participation are critical to the success of the program. Families initially connect with the program because of the strong reputation that Waminda has in the community. However, the Nabu team does not assume or expect families to automatically trust the program or team members, particularly because of many families' lived experiences with the risks related to the child protection system.

To build this trust and develop a relationship with a family, the Nabu team focuses on cultural identity and strengths. The team ensures that families have an informed cultural understanding of the best interests of the child, and spends time getting to know the families and the context of the challenges that they face. Families are supported through family-led decision making, family yarning sessions, deep listening and critically reflective practices. In turn, their concerns become the drivers of individual and systemic change.

The team uses a series of program-specific tools, including a strengths-based assessment and the Growth and Empowerment Measure, to guide the families and team to explore wellbeing from a holistic perspective. These tools are shaped by the Waminda Balaang Healing Framework and use narrative therapy-informed questions to draw out family members' skills, knowledge and hopes while also identifying areas of need and support. These tools are not used to categorise families, but rather to promote family members as active responders and highlight families' social and physical contexts.

Following the assessment, the family receives intensive support to build up their own agency and control in their personal decisions and lives. The Nabu program takes an ecological approach to supporting families by liaising with other services already involved with the family, such as NDIS providers, schools, allied health practitioners and midwives. In order to ensure that multiple aspects of wellbeing are considered, the program provides in-home practical supports; individual and family therapeutic support; mentoring; and coordination of case planning with referral points such as education, housing, health, legal, non-government organisations and justice-related services.

During the initial family assessment, the team addresses each family's experience of systemic abuse and assists the family to identify and address

immediate stressors at the individual, family and system levels. The team endeavours to meet families where they *are* (in time) and, unlike other models, the Nabu program does not have stages that families have to work through. The family will identify opportunities to support their longer-term concerns and needs while the Nabu team will engage them in continual learning and unlearning through a commitment to critical reflection. The team also tailors their responses to be appropriate for each family member: the child might have a counsellor, the mother might have a caseworker, the father might have a mentor and a counsellor, the sister might attend a group, while the family will have a whole-of-family caseworker and be visited by a community Elder. Families in the Shoalhaven region also get access to the range of holistic Waminda services.

Team members explore who each child is and how they want to grow in the face of adversity, while the children learn to live in both worlds. The Nabu team connects children in with Waminda's other services, in particular Waminda's Nabu Guman Nanga-Mai (young boys' group) and Bulwul Balaang Group (young girls' group), which facilitate cultural connections, self-respect, connection to Country and respect towards others.

Using a decolonising lens, the team invites workers from DCJ and related services to collaborate with the family to create new ways of working and genuinely understand and value Aboriginal ways of *knowing, doing and being*. Family case plans also tailor services' responses to the family's strengths and hopes.

As the program offers services up to 18 months, the team can continue to support a family even after DCJ workers have closed the DCJ case. The team has found that this often is when families feel safer to disclose their worries.

WORKING WITH MEN AS FATHER FIGURES

A major contributor to children being removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care is because of children's exposure to and experience of domestic violence, which often is perpetrated by father figures. The Nabu team recognises the positive and intergenerational benefits of engaging men who use violence; that this both supports men to address and change this behaviour and supports



women and children to be safe. It also offers an alternative approach to victim-blaming the mother for her children being in a violent environment.

The team uses a strength-based collaborative approach when working with men, supporting them to become the types of men and fathers that they want to be and to stand strong in their (positive) power. Through such initiatives as the Djah Djah Yarning men's group, the Nabu team help the men to understand and address their behaviours, focus on culture as a means to gain a sense of pride and care for Country and its people, gain support from male role models in the community, and engage with male Elders as a group and individually. The team supports the men to address any alcohol and/or other drug use, recognise the risks that others face when the men use these substances, and identify the complexities around why these men are using and/or abusing these substances. The team also helps the men to address possible isolation, in recognising that this can be a contributing factor to the use of violence. The team strives to work proactively with these men and support them on their healing journey, consolidating successful changes and endeavouring to make these sustainable.

Initially, many men are reluctant to engage with the program as they often have been misunderstood and mistreated by services. However, the team works hard to demonstrate that it is welcoming and present for all family members as well as the family as a whole, and it includes men who might not be living in the family home or might be incarcerated. Nonetheless, the men's readiness is essential and the team appreciates that if a man is not ready to engage, this is to be respected.

The initial decision to engage men is led by the mothers, with the team assessing the possibility of including the man/father, asking what his role is in the mother's situation, and whether it is appropriate (and how) for him to be involved. This approach is taken as the team recognises that these women often are the main connection to the men, the people who best understand what these men have been through, and often take responsibility for the men's wellbeing. Ultimately, the team listens to the voices of the women and children and is careful to regularly gather feedback on whether change is happening or not. The team also recognises that these women often have limited options, caught between protecting their children, themselves and their community from individual violence and systemic abuse.

FAMILY BRIEFING TEAM DISCUSSIONS

The team gets together on a fortnightly basis to reflect on its work with families, working through a series of considerations that help all team members build a contextualised and holistic understanding of each family. The team reflects on families' hopes and risks, the level of engagement of family members and whether engagement is improving. Each member also reflects on assumptions that they and others have made about the family and considers the broader context in which a family may be struggling. Discussions also cover what changes have been noticed, what each family has taught the team, what has made a difference for a family and what each family can be proud of. Team members do not shy away from raising what has not been done well or where the team might still boldly step up. In these discussions, the team also reflects on what the family would say about how team members have spoken about the family in that meeting, to reflect on the team's language and judgements.



NABU'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT'S DEPT. OF COMMUNITIES AND JUSTICE (DCJ)

One of the program's objectives, as outlined in the funding agreement, is to "promote and support decolonisation through service-system-wide systemic change [that] reflects promising practice, to enable improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, young people and families".¹⁰

In this vein, Nabu works collaboratively with DCJ to attend to the child protection agency's concerns about a family while also advocating for system changes on a case-by-case basis as well as at the policy and leadership levels. The Nabu team leverages off Waminda's existing robust relationship with DCJ to advocate for each family's needs and hopes and offers alternative narratives to the ones first put forward by DCJ. This collaborative way of working has required both the Nabu team and DCJ staff to establish relationships of trust and be prepared to have difficult conversations that centre around the families' voices.

As domestic violence is the greatest risk identified in Aboriginal child removals, the Nabu team works with DCJ staff to consider the best solution for both women and children in situations of domestic violence. As DCJ's primary focus is on protection of the child, the team has worked with some DCJ staff members to appreciate that while a mother is usually considered to be the child's primary carer, when she and her children are victimised by a father figure, both the mother and the child need support and protection. This approach has helped offset when the 'failure to protect' perception is written into DCJ individual assessments. It also goes towards supporting necessary systems change in regards to any unfair gendered expectations of mothers, as identified in reports such as a 2015 Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) paper¹¹ and the 2019 *Family is Culture* review report¹².

The relationship with DCJ has been established through several approaches, including developing a memorandum of understanding; co-locating staff at each other's offices; DCJ staff, managers and directors undertaking Waminda's cultural immersion workshops; DCJ workers preferably meeting a family at Waminda because it feels like a 'safe space'; DCJ inviting Waminda to group supervisions and other decision-making meetings; and, the Nabu team meeting with DCJ staff to

resolve differences at the local level where possible and addressing more systemic challenges at higher levels of management.

The two stakeholders also hold quarterly leadership meetings to highlight what is working, to address challenges, and develop more efficient ways-of-working strategies. The Nabu team provides regular feedback to DCJ on approaches that assist in facilitating respect for families and safety for children, and occasionally holds collaboration meetings where the Office of the Senior Practitioner is in attendance. Nabu staff always have managers and multiple staff present at a DCJ meeting when discussing a family to ensure that the family is represented as best as possible and that Aboriginal Koori staff feel safe enough to speak up and to attend to the power imbalance in the decision-making process.

ADVOCACY

Wherever possible, the team attempts to influence its networks and systems to work in ways that are culturally safe and respectful to Aboriginal families and children. The program recognises that change cannot only be made at the individual and family levels but that there also needs to be systemic-level change.

At a local level, the Nabu team participates in meetings where decisions about a family are made, whether the family is present or not. In these meetings, team members promote the voice of the family, contextualise their challenges, and pay attention to deficit or pathologising language. The results often are a more accurate account of the problem, with recognition of the family's abilities and knowledge.

Nabu members also work with service providers who may not be informed of what a family may be experiencing and may not be aware of how their responses are putting the family at increased risk. The Nabu team supports the service providers to find alternative ways to work together with the family.

This form of advocacy extends into the child protection context and interrupts DCJ *business as usual* practices (also described as *ritualism* in the New South Wales *Family is Culture* report¹³). The Nabu team advocates for DCJ case plans and reports to not only outline DCJ's identified risks but



also reflect the family's experiences, highlight their strengths, their acts of protection and resistance as well as unhelpful and detrimental service responses.

The team has seen narratives about families shift dramatically, including in the DCJ case plans. These plans have become more achievable and reflect what the family actually wants. In turn, families have become more engaged, which has meant that they are less likely to be seen as resistant to change and so have their children removed. DCJ staff have also developed greater contextual and cultural understandings and have started to convey more respect and less judgement towards Aboriginal families.

In certain instances, advocacy can take on a different approach, where the team has to request extraordinary meetings with DCJ management and casework specialists to resolve significant differences in positions. At times, Nabu members write reports and affidavits based on file reviews to challenge the DCJ narrative being put to the court.

In October 2019, Waminda hosted a two-day cultural immersion workshop for DCJ staff, in line with its commitment to influence changes in the state child protection service's approach to at-risk families. This work resulted in the film, *Truth Telling*,¹⁴ which was aired on national television's ABC Compass and focused on addressing white privilege and institutionalised racism. DCJ shared the following reflections after the workshop:

"Over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is a direct reflection that we are missing something"

"[It's important to be] aware of white privilege and sitting in the discomfort of this"

"[This has been a] reality check as to racism being so active today"

"The systems [government / health / DCJ] promote fear and more difficulty for Aboriginal people to navigate"

"Being raised by family versus being raised in out-of-home care.... [it's a] loss of connection.... deterioration in mental health ... deterioration in education"

"Culture – live in it.... You can't visit Culture"

Similar reflections have been provided by staff from the New South Wales Department of Justice, Department of Health, and the local health district, who have all attended similar workshops over the last two years.

MEASURING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The Nabu team collects and documents family stories and narratives as part of a monthly reporting framework to demonstrate that families are experiencing positive outcomes as a result of their engagement with the program. The team has also implemented a comprehensive data collection system that covers the number of families engaged; their uptake and duration of support; the number of children restored, preserved and removed (including where the children are placed); engagement with men; outcomes for any family members at risk of or engaging with the justice and other systems; and systemic change initiatives.

These monitoring and evaluation tools have managed to capture the positive changes experienced by children and families who have engaged with the program. Families are reporting that they are finding themselves able to address concerns so that their children remain with or are returned to them, as well as recognise the value of the Nabu program in their lives.

Outcomes for families are documented from a cultural perspective and privilege the voices of the families. These are documented to reflect both the Balaang Healing Framework and the New South Wales Government's Human Services Outcomes Framework.¹⁵

The Nabu Advisory Group – made up of Waminda staff, academics, researchers, and peak Aboriginal bodies – has convened a research and evaluation group of three Aboriginal academics who will develop an approach to documenting outcomes for families and the unique characteristics of the program: what is working and why.

Waminda has also signed up to a four-year research initiative with the University of New South Wales and the Jumbanna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney to conduct research into restoration in the sector.

Furthermore, DCJ has contracted Indigenous Professional Services Management Consultants to undertake a formative evaluation of the Nabu program, with the final report expected to be available in late 2021.

Early indications of what is working includes:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Collaboration | working with DCJ to influence changes in its approach to at-risk families |
| Team approach | there is always someone there to help |
| Culturally safe | cultural mentors and culturally driven assessment tools |
| Collective | groups for women, men, boys and girls |
| Strengths | strengths-based approaches |
| Advocacy | advocacy and creative support |
| Gender balance | working with men |
| Supportive | walking alongside – not telling families what to do |
| Explanatory | explaining the child protection system to families |

DOCUMENTING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Waminda has developed two films that document the organisation’s approach to working with families:

- *Waminda Video 2018*: https://youtu.be/lmd0_Eu00DM
- *Waminda Video 2019*: <https://youtu.be/TGkX0GB2GjA>

Currently, the Nabu program is exploring ways to document systemic change, using the New South Wales *Family is Culture* report to highlight how the program is addressing many of the report’s recommendations.



PARTICIPANT AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

FAMILIES

"It's been amazing. Since Nabu came into our life, things have been looking up for us, one step at a time. We thank everyone involved"

Participating family

"I can talk to Nabu workers that I work with, pretty much about anything... if I talk to FACS,¹⁶ it's a lot more stressful and I think something's going to happen every time I say something. It feels like [Nabu workers are] on my side, they help me get through so much stuff. Waminda is probably one of the main causes that helped me get my daughter back"

Participating mother

"Thanks so much, this means a lot to me and I appreciate it and I am willing to engage in anything that's gonna make me a better person, partner, dad"

Participating father

"This is life changing"

Participating family member

"Everything I did for [DCJ] just wasn't good enough ... Just had no time of day for me... Then as soon as Waminda were involved, it was a 360 turnaround... How I am with my Waminda workers is how I wanted a relationship with my [DCJ] worker. I wanted to be able to trust her, trust her like I could trust these [women]... If I didn't have the support of Waminda, I wouldn't be here. I one hundred percent tell you, I would not be here. I would probably be either dead or just gone. I would have hurt myself because I didn't know what to do"

Participating family member

"[You] honoured your word and been there when you said you would"

Participating father

"I know who my mob is now. [This is the] first time they have met my cousins. When they saw each other they hugged. [I] have been disconnected from cousins from since they were two years old, eight years old"

Participating family member

"My boys have had issues with anger and they have remembered how to communicate how they are feeling before they get angry"

Participating family member

"Nabu stands beside me even when I'm in a bad mood and not feeling good. Like moving into the house, they were there with me through that and they're still here. I know they want the best for us"

Participating family member

"I like the Monday home visits 'cos youse know how it is to be a full-time mother and youse know about mothering. It's good to have women to talk to because it's been full on with everything"

Participating mother

"It also helps my partner have his own time 'cos me and Baby are with youse having food. He (Dad) likes that me and Baby have some time with workers to figure things out and learn new things. Youse share your life stories with me and help me with trying to eat healthy and drink water and stuff like that. He knows I don't really talk to many people. I feel more confident talking to Nabu"

Participating mother

"Thank you so much just for thinking of me, you have a very big heart. Thanks for being there for my daughter. I think being around you has helped her more than any of the counsellors she's seen"

Participating family member



"My shoulders feel more relaxed from when I came in... I did not feel any judgement here"

Participating mother after a therapy session

"I am glad I can talk to someone about how I want to be as a partner"

Participating father

SCHOOL

"What did you do? Whatever you've done... they come in early, respectful, happy and get their work done. A whole days' work is done by 11am. So I took them on an excursion"

Schoolteacher about four children in the teacher's class.

"The connection that I observe between yourself and this family is so wonderful. You can tell Mum trusts you. They are lucky to be working with you"

Schoolteacher to Nabu caseworker

NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND JUSTICE

"We work differently in community because of our relationship with you"

DCJ manager

"I find your approach with families [is] professional yet so friendly, which makes it easy to work with you, make plans for change and encourage families to think about and address risk issues. You always follow through and find we are both on the same page while working, which is great!"

DCJ staff member

"We hope that one day Aboriginal families can come to Nabu and won't have to work with DCJ"

DCJ staff member



ENDNOTES

1. Indigenous.gov.au 2017, *Closing the Gap 2017 – Minister for Indigenous Health, Minister for Aged Care* speech.
2. In this paper, the term 'Aboriginal' refers to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. Waminda 2021, *Our vision* webpage.
4. Waminda 2020, *Waminda Annual Report 2019-20*, p. 9.
5. Ibid.
6. Waminda 2020, *Waminda Annual Report 2019-20*, p. 13.
7. Services include pregnancy tests, cervical screenings, ultrasound referrals, antenatal checks and classes, postnatal checks and home visits, placenta tree program, contraception education, booking for hospital appointments, pathology collection, belly casting, outreach, support, advocacy and referral pathways.
8. Waminda 2020, *Waminda Annual Report 2019-20*, p. 18-19.
9. Waminda 2018, *Nabu Documentary 1*.
10. Waminda-New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice Nabu Program Funding Agreement (2021-2024).
11. Campo, M 2015, 'Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses', *Child Family Community Australia*, Paper No. 36, CFCA information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, VIC, p.14.
12. Davis, M 2019, *Family is Culture: Independent Review of Aboriginal Children in OOHC*, Sydney, pp. 168-171.
13. Davis, M 2019.
14. Waminda 2019, *Truth Telling* short film.
15. New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice 2021, *The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework*.
16. FACS: New South Wales Government Family and Community Services (now DCJ).

REFERENCES

- Campo, M 2015, 'Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses', *Child Family Community Australia*, Paper No. 36, CFCA information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, VIC, p.14. Available at: <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/childrens-exposure-domestic-and-family-violence>
- Davis, M 2019, *Family is Culture: Independent Review of Aboriginal Children in OOHC*, Sydney. Available at: www.familyisculture.nsw.gov.au
- Indigenous.gov.au 11 February 2017, *Closing the Gap 2017 – Minister for Indigenous Health, Minister for Aged Care* speech. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mfaN3z96Jw
- New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice 2021, *The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework*. Available at: www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/human-services-outcomes-framework
- Waminda 2018, *Nabu Documentary 1*. Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmd0_EuOODM
- Waminda 2019, *Truth Telling* short film, ABC Compass. Available at: www.abc.net.au/religion/watch/compass/truth-tellingimage/12350536
- Waminda 2020, *Waminda Annual Report 2019-20*. Available at: www.waminda.org.au/annual-reports
- Waminda 2021, *Our vision* webpage. Available at: www.waminda.org.au/our-vision

