

Australian Indigenous Communities and Out-of-home Care: Models of Best-practice

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Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Background

- *Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services commissioned the Clearinghouse to conduct a research project for the Australian Council for Children and Parenting (ACCAP)*
- *Purpose: To share good practice in Indigenous out-of-home care arrangements among government and non-government agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities*
- *Contribute to: National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers 2004-6*



Focus of the research project

- *To build capacity of Indigenous carers, to look at the needs of non-Indigenous carers, and enhance cultural connections for Indigenous children in out-of-home care placements:*
 - ◆ **Recruitment**
 - ◆ **Retention**
 - ◆ **Assessment**
 - ◆ **Training**
 - ◆ **Support**
 - ◆ **Services for children**



Method

- *Extensive literature review of Australian research and key reports, supplemented with relevant international literature (e.g., Indigenous issues in Canada and USA)*
- *Consultations with key stakeholders in every state and territory*
- *In two states (WA & QLD) conduct focus groups with:*
 - ◆ **Indigenous carers**
 - ◆ **Non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children**
 - ◆ **Indigenous children and young people**



Researchers

- *Dr Daryl Higgins*
- *Marlene Burchill*
- *Leah Bromfield*
- *Nicholas Richardson*
- *Supported by QLD & WA departments and ACCAP Children at Risk Committee (Chair: Simon Schrapel)*



Stakeholder Consultation Procedure

- *In each state/territory, the key organisations were used to identify other organisations and individuals to interview*
- *Arranged face-to-face interviews (or where this was not possible, phone interviews)*
- *Some organisations nominated a group of people to interview (group consultations)*



Focus Group Procedure

- *In WA and QLD, the departments worked with local agencies, AFCA and CREATE Foundation to identify carers and young people to participate*
- *Participants were given a store voucher as a thank-you, and to reimburse them for travel costs or other expenses in getting to the focus group (\$10-20)*



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Results are based on:

- *Consultations with 80 individual organisational representatives or groups*
- *Focus groups with 9 Indigenous carers*
- *Focus groups with 1 non-Indigenous carers of Indigenous children*
- *Focus groups with 16 Indigenous young people*



1. *Perspectives of Young People*

- *Age range: 7-16*
- *Not possible to generalise*
- *Range of views that Indigenous young people in care may have*
- *Time needed to build rapport and trust*
- *Used open-ended discussion topics, and invitations to draw a picture or write about their story*



Questions used with young people

- *Who do you live with? (what are the positives; and what would you like to change)*
- *What makes someone good at caring for young people?*
- *What opportunities do you get to be involved in Indigenous community/cultural activities*
- *How often do you get to see your birth family?*
- *If the politician responsible for running foster care was here today, what would you want to tell him or her?*



Themes from young people

- *Cultural activities*
 - ◆ ***“Cultural activities reminds you of back home. It’s cool to do those things.”***
- *Connection to family*
- *Connection to community*
 - ◆ More focused on wanting to be back with family and community than with “safety”



15 year old girl:

I'm 15 years old and I have 4 brother's and they live with some beautiful carers...I sometimes go up there and have weekend's with them... they also speak to my mother over the phone and they also go home for a short or a long term Holdiay... This term they are going home for a long term holiday... I always go home a lot... I'm in a care with my aunty she take good care of me... and she's my mother smalles sister. My brother's live with a indigenous lady... she is so nice... and when my brother's go home we have fun every holiday they come home... Cause I love home.



2. Perspectives of carers, agencies, departments and Indigenous organisations

- *Recruitment*
- *Assessment*
- *Training*
- *Support*
- *Retention*
- *Services for children*



Recruitment

- *Insufficient number of carers*
 - ◆ Non-relative carers
 - ◆ Short-term, emergency placements
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) culture an advantage*
 - ◆ Shared care of children is natural for Indigenous communities
- *Material disadvantage*
- *Past government policies*
 - ◆ Suspicion
 - ◆ Grief
 - ◆ Fear of assessment procedures
- *ATSI people report that it is best practice for ATSI agencies to recruit both kinship and non-kinship carers*



Assessment

- *Assessments need to be adapted to make them culturally appropriate*
- *Sensitive to differences in communication styles (including timing, length and format of assessment procedures)*
- *Inappropriate criteria for Indigenous child-rearing practices*
- *Best Practice:*
 - ◆ Informal
 - ◆ Less focus on material resources
 - ◆ Use of placement support workers
 - ◆ Use of ‘referee reports’ (use information from community networks)



Training

- *Difficult in understanding the Department*
- *Lack of Indigenous-specific training or input into design of training*
- *Need for access to training for informal and kinship carers*
- *Non-Indigenous carers need cultural-awareness training*
- *Difficulties with access (transport; child-care, etc.)*
- *Best-practice:*
 - ◆ Share training between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies
 - ◆ Link training opportunities to services/activities for children (e.g., offered concurrently with camps for foster children - as well as carers' biological children)



Support & Retention

- *Effectively managing the relationship between carers and the Department*
 - ◆ Mixed findings - but considerable concerns
 - ◆ Best-practice: support from Indigenous agency which manages all liaison with the Department
- *Information about entitlements for young people in care*
- *Information about the child's health; family, etc.*
- *Difficulty with reimbursements & payments*
- *Differential support for kinship and non-kinship care; and formal cf. informal care*
- *Managing contact with child's birth family*



Support & Retention, cont.

- *Availability of respite*
- *Specialist support services for Indigenous carers*
 - ◆ Carer development plans
 - ◆ Dedicated foster and kinship carer support workers
 - ◆ Support groups
- *Involvement of carers in case planning*
- *Supports for non-Indigenous carers*
- *Practical supports (e.g., needing a mini-bus)*
- *Best-practice:*
 - ◆ Building capacity in ATSI community agencies



Services for Children

- *Exploring different models of care, especially for children with high needs (e.g., residential; family groups; highly trained full-time carers to provide intensive caring options)*
- *Cultural mentoring*
- *Mental health services*
- *Planning for leaving care*
- *Connection between siblings*
- *Informal supports*



Limitations

- *Convenience sample of carers and young people*
- *Stakeholder consultations were extensive, but varied in the depth of knowledge*
- *Need to be balanced by audit of current policies and practices in each state/territory*



Implications

- *Appropriate support for carers and Indigenous children in care is needed including Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers, kinship and foster carers, formal and informal carers*
- *Recruitment, assessment, monitoring, training, support and retention of carers are interrelated*
- *Importance of aboriginal managed agencies*



Framework for understanding 'best practice'

- *Recognise local differences, based on cultural, geographic, historic and other social factors (e.g., in defining adequate standards of accommodation)*
- *Listen to, involve and facilitate local leadership by Indigenous communities*
- *Focus on 'promising practices', rather than a definitive 'best practice'*



Disseminating promising practices

- *Assist with documenting, evaluating and disseminating promising practice to:*
 - ◆ **Policy-makers**
 - ◆ **Child and family welfare service managers**
 - ◆ **Indigenous agencies and peak bodies**
 - ◆ **Non-Indigenous practitioners**
 - ◆ **Indigenous and non-Indigenous carers**
 - ◆ **researchers**



Questions

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