

South Australia

Family Matters South Australia's progressing of jurisdictional priority change efforts has been notably hindered by both the previous and current governments' lack of genuine engagement with, and funding of, Aboriginal community managed and/or led organisations and specialist representative groups, which includes the Family Matters Working Group in South Australia.

The right of Aboriginal people to determine their future, particularly with respect to decisions affecting their future generations, has long been denied. The Family Matters SA is concerned that in the context of the current reform process this hasn't changed, and is unlikely to change without a genuine shift in thinking about the value of deep engagement with Aboriginal families, communities and groups.

Since commencing the *forensic* or legalistic approach to system reform presented in *The Life They Deserve* (Nyland 2016), which casts the child protection system as the *expert* in reform measures, both the previous and current governments have alienated essential community and cultural professionals from a partnership in the design and approach to the support and protection of children and the prevention of their contact with the child protection system.

Despite an initial investment of over \$200 million to commence implementing the child protection system reform, as detailed in *A Fresh Start*, data from the Report on Government Services (RoGS) as well as the Guardian for Children and Young People (SA) has confirmed that, over the past 12 months, the number of Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home-care **has increased**; the number of Aboriginal children placed in accordance with the ATSICPP **has decreased**; and the interconnected Aboriginal youth incarceration rates **increased above the national average**.

The Department for Child Protection's annual \$50,000 of funding to Family Matters SA was received and is appreciated. The Department for Child Protection has demonstrated its willingness to engage with and support the Family Matters campaign in South Australia and to assign delegates to the state working group. Family Matters SA has reminded the government that a whole of government approach to supporting the campaign is vital, and that the current financial contribution to the campaign seems absolutely tokenistic when the SA Government child protection reform implementation budget is examined. Family Matters SA is further concerned with the growing body of evidence confirming that despite the over \$400 million the SA Government is spending to "fix" the broken child protection system, the two most obvious abject failures for responding to the escalating crisis of Aboriginal children being forcibly removed and severed from family, community and culture remain:

- Government failure to fund Aboriginal services to provide holistic, socio-medical, wrap-around services that intervene early to support, strengthen and heal Aboriginal families and communities; and
- Government failure to enable a genuine space for self-determination – a platform in policy, legislation and resourcing that provides families and communities with genuine opportunities for empowerment to draw on their strengths and lead responses to the issues facing their children, families and communities.

Twenty-one years after *Bringing Them Home*, and ten years after the Federal Government's apology to the Stolen Generations, Aboriginal families and communities in South Australia remain justifiably concerned that nothing has changed. The Family Matters Working Group in South Australia reiterates that the problems facing Aboriginal families and communities in this state go far beyond the remit of just the Department for Child Protection's ability to protect vulnerable children. What is required is genuine political leadership and a willingness to invest in culturally responsive, culturally valid, Aboriginal-led responses that take place at the community level.