

STRATEGIES

In 2017-2018 the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) continued to make significant shifts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal Children and Young People in out-of-home care. In 2018 we reported the development of the Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy and the new approach that would be implemented to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people, their families and their communities. Whilst we acknowledge that we continue to have areas that we can significantly improve on, we also have the opportunity in 2019 to celebrate some areas that we have made significant growth on since reporting on 2018.

In June 2018, FACS implemented its Aboriginal Cultural Capability Framework commencing with a three-year staged rollout of mandatory Connecting with Aboriginal Communities training for all frontline and non-frontline staff, which is delivered in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), the NSW Aboriginal education peak body. The training is delivered over three days (two days for non-frontline

staff) and is adapted to fit the local context of each community it is being delivered in. The training covers a range of topics including Aboriginal culture and spirituality; kinship, family and community structures; cultural bias and racism; and the intergenerational impact of colonisation, paternalism and the welfare system. Participants are also taken on Country to learn about the significance of local Aboriginal sites and also participate in cultural activities. Most importantly, during the training staff hear stories from Stolen Generation Survivors, Elders or other members of the local community and learn about their lived experiences with the child welfare system. Local Aboriginal organisations are also invited to present on their services. Since June 2018, 897 FACS staff have completed the face-to-face training. A web-based phone/tablet app will also be launched shortly which will provide direct links for FACS staff to access current local Aboriginal information, key community contacts and a service directory to help improve their understanding and capacity to better meet the needs of the Aboriginal people, families and communities they work with. Benchmark data showing the initial impact of the training on individual participant's practice in their workplace will be collected as part of an overall evaluation of the program.

Please find below some of the programs and actions aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal Children and young people in out-of-home care.

The NSW Practice Framework

The NSW Practice Framework, launched in September 2017, brings together endorsed practice approaches, reforms and research to guide FACS child protection work across systems, policies and practice. United by principles, language and standards, the Framework puts children and families at the forefront of FACS work.

The NSW Practice Framework gives permission for casework practice to reflect the agency's commitment to justice doing, dignity giving and family seeing. This means that casework with a family needs to reflect an understanding of the family within their entire context, their culture and past experiences, their strengths as well as the risks, all while upholding a child's experience, their safety and the likelihood of future risk. The NSW Practice Framework aligns with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles, and elements of the Practice Framework that have particular applicability to strengthening practice with Aboriginal families includes:

Five evidence-informed principles: The principles - culture, language, relationships, critique, ethics and values – are at the heart of the Framework. They connect practitioners to their work with families and invite them to attend to power; social justice, culture and privilege in all interactions. The culture principle specifically supports practitioners in understanding that culture is ever-present. Practitioners are encouraged to develop their cultural understanding of how past practices and policies are experienced today, and importantly calls on practitioners to not repeat past injustices. This principle supports practitioners to deeply consider how they commence their involvement with an Aboriginal family, and what they can do to share their power with Aboriginal families and the broader community.

Dignity Driven Practice: This is a new practice approach for FACS and one that has the potential to strengthen our work with Aboriginal families. Based on response-based practice, this approach attends to power in every moment; the power of language; acts of resistance and social responses. The approach is underpinned by a belief that wherever there is violence or oppression there is resistance. It encourages practitioners to look for these acts of resistance as one way to uphold dignity by acknowledging what families are already doing to keep their children safe and building on these acts to create increased safety. This approach promotes self-determination and family-led decision making.

Family Finding: The Family Finding approach encourages practitioners to build a network of safe people around a child from the first point of interaction. It recognises the importance of emotional permanency and seeks to build a network of family and friends around a child for a life time. The model has key steps to support practitioners to find the network. Practitioners are encouraged to look beyond traditional family finding exercises and act with urgency to find lifelong connections. Blended Perspective meetings are facilitated which enable the network to come up with a plan to meet the child's current and long-term needs. Family Finding is a strength-based, solution-focussed model that has the potential to harness the strength of Aboriginal communities to look after their children, on country, safely.

Aboriginal Practice team

The Independent Review of Aboriginal Children in out-of-home care is nearing completion. The Office of the Senior Practitioner (OSP) has led the FACS aspect of this review process and in anticipation for the release of the report and its recommendations, FACS has agreed in principle to the establishment of an Aboriginal Practice Support team that will sit within the OSP. The structure, role and responsibilities of this team is currently being scoped. While the detail has not yet been determined, the sole focus of this team will be about strengthening FACS practice with Aboriginal families.

The OSP is consulting about the development of an Aboriginal Practice unit. An options paper is pending. There will be further consultation following the approval of the draft options paper. The functions of this team will be determined during the consultation.

The establishment of an Aboriginal Practice Unit within the OSP is a critical step to monitor and improve FACS child protection practice across the state and include a stronger Aboriginal voice, deeper cultural perspectives and improve cultural accountability and accord.

Specific priority practice areas the unit aims to improve, will change over time. Preliminary thinking, led by information coming from the independent review of Aboriginal children who entered care in 2015/2016 and other consultation, suggests decision making about Aboriginal children, especially around entry into care; cultural planning; consultation; children in care seeing their families and returning children to the care of parents or family will be priorities. Further prioritisation will be led by analysis of the final independent review report, consultation and evidence gathered by FACS and others.

The Case worker Development Program Redesign Project

OSP is currently leading a project to redesign the existing Caseworker Development Program (CDP)¹. The new CDP will be ready for delivery to new caseworkers before the end of the 2019/20 financial year.

The primary objective of the CDP redesign project is to adapt the curriculum so it provides the agency with competent, confident and skilled new caseworkers. The new CDP will align more closely with contemporary practice messages, research and the approaches, principles and capabilities of the NSW Practice Framework.

This will include a detailed integration of the Framework principle that 'culture is ever present' in child protection work. The values, knowledge and skills required to work with Aboriginal families will be integrated into all modules so that the learning starts with culture, rather than the historical approach of including cultural information as an 'add on' at the end.

During the program, caseworkers will reflect how a history of colonisation, including the past actions of FACS, may affect how Aboriginal families respond when a caseworker knocks on their door. They will be supported to value the strengths of Aboriginal culture, community and country, and see opportunities to use this to create better outcomes for Aboriginal children. They will be encouraged to value and prioritise family-and-community-led decision making, alongside the critical importance of keeping Aboriginal children with family and on country.

To achieve these objectives, the OSP is working closely with a range of internal and external Aboriginal colleagues and groups to design the CDP content. These include:

- Aboriginal Outcomes (FACS)
- The Aboriginal Reference Group (FACS)
- NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

¹ The CDP is a mandatory 16 week foundational program that provides new Family and Community Services (FACS) caseworkers with the relevant skills and knowledge required to be a child protection caseworker. The CDP is a flexible blended learning program for practitioners to learn, demonstrate and refine their knowledge and skills in working with children and families in the NSW child protection system.

- Grandmothers Against Removals NSW (GMAR NSW)
- The four Stolen Generation Organisations.

Their Futures Matter (TFM)

TFM's Futures Planning and Support (FP&S) initiative will provide mentoring and other support for young people who are leaving or have left out-of-home care from when they are 17 years until they turn 25 years of age (care leavers) and will address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people by ensuring that 40% of the clients being supported are Aboriginal.

The project will be delivered on the Mid North Coast and in Western NSW and Aboriginal non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will be the main service providers. The service model will support care leavers to connect to family, culture and Country, with one of the aims of the project being a reduction in the rate of removal of care leavers' own children into out-of-home care.

System Transformation is one aspect of TFM's reform of the NSW child and family service system. The goal is to design a system where wellbeing and child protection is delivered in the context of family and community, and vulnerable children and families are connected with the services and supports they need at the earliest possible opportunity. Over time, investment in the service system will be redirected away from the statutory child protection system towards prevention and early intervention.

Phase one of the System Transformation focused on examining research evidence, data and practice perspectives to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current system. This work established guiding principles and high-level design elements for the future system. Phase two is currently underway and involves the development of detailed options for the future system. TFM is drawing on stakeholder consultations, evidence reviews, analysis of responses to our discussion paper, data modelling/analysis and various 'try, test and learn' pilots to identify the system changes required to achieve TFM's objectives.

Permanency Support Program

FACS is currently undertaking one of the most significant reforms to out-of-home care systems in decades. The Permanency Support Program (PSP) was introduced on 1 October 2017. PSP creates a continuum of care across the delivery of services for children and families and prioritises supporting and maintaining children and young people with family. PSP has changed the way we fund our service providers. PSP funding processes set out new expectations of the sector that include:

- Working towards permanency from the time a child or young person enters care
- Collaborating more closely with FACS and other services and supports to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people.
- Targeting support packages to address the specific needs of individual children, young people and their families.

The new service system is designed to be 'child and family centric', in contrast to the previous 'placement-based' system. The PSP has introduced specific funding packages for Aboriginal service providers who provide foster care placements for Aboriginal children. The Aboriginal foster care package provides extra funds to enable Aboriginal service providers to undertake work within communities to build local capacity and resources. The PSP has introduced an Aboriginal Cultural plan package to fund comprehensive and holistic cultural care planning and genealogy work to support connection to family, community and culture for every Aboriginal child in out-of-home care.

Aboriginal Case Management Policy

To support the implementation of the PSP in 2017, AbSec was commissioned to develop the Aboriginal Case Management Policy (ACMP). The policy statement was published in October 2018 and followed by the Rules and Practice Guidance in February 2019. This policy applies to all Aboriginal children and young whether case managed by FACS or Funded Service Providers.

The ACMP is a landmark policy and provides a common framework for the way we deliver culturally sensitive casework services, responsive to the needs of Aboriginal children, their families and communities. The policy establishes an integrated case-management approach tailored to the needs of Aboriginal children and families, that commences early in the continuum of support and that empowers and supports families and communities to reduce the incidence of harm, addressing identified risks and supporting Aboriginal children and young people to thrive.

The implementation of the ACMP will help FACS reduce over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care system. The development of a state-wide implementation plan will support district implementation based on existing operational structures, local needs and conditions.

Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

FGC is a family-focused, strengths-based form of alternative dispute resolution that strengthens partnerships between FACS and families and encourages greater family decision making and responsibility. FGC aims to:

- Empower parents and families in making decisions to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people at risk of significant harm, through the development and implementation of a Family Plan.
- Improve outcomes for children and young people by providing them and their extended family with a stronger voice in decisions about their care.
- Maintain children in the care of family where possible by including extended family in the FGC process.
- Build respectful relationships and communication between FACS and families.

FACS will shortly be opening an e-tender process to increase its FGC facilitator panel supply and spread, including Aboriginal FGC facilitators.

In some cases where cultural support may be required to account for a family's cultural context and background, the FGC facilitator and family will negotiate who the most appropriate person is to provide this for the family. This may include members from their existing networks, for example, a community member. If there is not a suitable option, additional support is sourced by FACS.

When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, FGC promotes self-determination through increased family participation in decision making: 43% of families referred for a FGC in 2016-17 were Aboriginal families. Preliminary data for 2018/19 at May 2019 indicates that of approximately 506 FGCs, 40% of participants were Aboriginal families.

Winangay Kinship Assessment Tool

FACS has implemented the Aboriginal designed Winangay Kinship Assessment Tool in New England, Hunter, Central Coast, South Western Sydney, Western Sydney, Nepean Blue Mountains and Sydney Districts. The Winangay tool and resources provide a strengths-based approach, assisting practitioners in their engagement and assessment of Aboriginal kinship carers for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. The yarning interviews and visually appealing cards use culturally relevant language and cover complex and difficult issues in a safe way. Preliminary findings are very positive with early signs indicating that the tool/process is achieving practice change; increasing the confidence and cultural competence of staff; and supporting improved working relationships with Aboriginal families.

Guardianship Support Model

FACS has commissioned AbSec to develop an Aboriginal Guardianship Support Model (GSM) using an Aboriginal Commissioning approach. The model will be piloted in two FACS districts. The GSM will provide support to guardians of children and young people who were in out-of-home care prior to a guardianship order and who require support to maintain the arrangement or ensure the child or young person's connection to culture.

Aboriginal Child and Family Centres

Nine purpose-built Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs) were established across NSW under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Education to deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

In 2016 due to service delivery gaps, asset maintenance and contractual issues, two centres from the nine were non-operational. In the last 12 months, FACS has operationalised the two centres by re-tendering service agreements and rectifying all outstanding maintenance/asset works. This has eliminated the service delivery gaps and as such all nine centres are currently operational and continue to deliver a network of integrated and culturally-appropriate services through a community hub model, tailored to the needs of the local communities.

Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) Aboriginal Strategy

A key priority for FACS is to support Aboriginal people, families and communities to achieve better outcomes and to create opportunities and practical actions to help break the cycle of disadvantage.

It is important that TEI reforms reflect the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people and their communities, as well as FACS's commitment to engage and build meaningful partnerships. One of the aims of the TEI program is to ensure Aboriginal children, young people and families have access to effective and culturally-safe support and services.

Four interlinked elements make up the TEI Aboriginal Strategy:

- Target resources to Aboriginal people and communities with the greatest need.
- Aboriginal early intervention service systems grounded in evidence-informed practice.
- Aboriginal self-determination facilitated through Aboriginal community control of service design and delivery.
- Increase flexibility so that Aboriginal clients are the centre of TEI outcomes

TEI reforms, underpin the state-wide target of 30% investment.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP)

NSW is leading work on a proposal for the national Child and Families Secretaries (CAFS) forum on the staged implementation of ATSICPP indicators for enhancing measurement and reporting of compliance.

In June 2019 SNAICC ran a workshop on enhancing implementation of the ATSICPP for FACS executive staff.

The workshop included a targeted discussion on known barriers to full implementation and identification of policy, practice and commissioning needs and strategies to enhance implementation.

Child protection legislative amendments

The NSW Government remains committed to working with Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal organisations across NSW to increase Aboriginal self-determination and Aboriginal participation in child protection decision-making. Amendments contained in the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Act 2018* that came into effect on 4 February 2019 will help ensure that more Aboriginal children and young people are supported in culturally-safe environments.

Aboriginal families will have greater opportunities to be involved in decisions about the care of their children to reduce the number of Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care e.g. amendments made to Sections 37(1A), (1B), (1C) – Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Partnering with NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec)

AbSec is a leading partner with the NSW Government to achieve growth in the Aboriginal child and family sector in NSW. FACS and AbSec worked together to develop the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (see below).

- FACS has approved funding for AbSec of approximately \$4.6 million in 2018/2019 for the delivery of its core peak activities, to provide the Aboriginal Foster Care Support Service, assorted partnership initiatives and project-specific work with FACS in a range of areas across child and family services.

Details of this funding are provided below.

Project	Description
Sector Development Program (Core funding)	Recurrent funding to provide core sector development service activities including: policy & advocacy contributions to develop sound social policy, and capacity building to strengthen the sector capability.
Aboriginal Foster Care Support Service (Core funding)	Recurrent funding to maintain the NSW Aboriginal Carer Support Line.
Their Futures Matter	Provide Aboriginal consultation to intermediary and service providers delivering new preservation and restoration service models (MST-CAN, FFT-CW).
Growth and Partnership Project	Support Aboriginal agencies delivering out of home care to maintain accreditation through targeted supports. Support Aboriginal partnerships working with mainstream organisations to realise accreditation and transition to standalone service delivery.
PACT, IFBS and IFP	Support Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) and one Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) service to improve service delivery and quality. Provide consultation to inform review of Intensive Family Preservation Programs in 2018/2019
Aboriginal Case Management Policy	Lead development of the FACS Aboriginal Case Management Policy & Guidelines
Strengthening Supports in West NSW	Establishment of an Aboriginal organisation, supported by workforce development initiatives and capacity support, in local areas to deliver a continuum of services.
Strengthening Supports in Far West NSW	Establishment of an Aboriginal organisation, supported by workforce development initiatives and capacity support, in local areas to deliver a continuum of services.
TEI Sector Assistance Strategy	Building the capacity of Aboriginal TEI Organisations to implement the TEI Outcomes Framework, building the Aboriginal evidence base, and training mainstream providers in Aboriginal cultural capability.
Guardianship Support Model	Engage with local communities to articulate a Guardianship Support Model

The Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy

The Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (the Strategy) outlines an approach over six years to build capacity of the Aboriginal service sector through a range of initiatives to promote Aboriginal-led service delivery, and remove barriers to success for Aboriginal organisations. Through the Strategy, FACS is working to meet commitments laid out in the FACS Strategic Plan to improve long-term outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

The outcomes that the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy is striving to achieve are:

- Service models are self-determined by Aboriginal communities.
- A high standard of service quality is maintained.
- There are meaningful employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.
- Strong, sustainable Aboriginal NGOs provide integrated services to Aboriginal children and families.

Phase one of the Strategy is currently being rolled out, with the establishment of a taskforce led by the Aboriginal Outcomes Cross Divisional directorate within FACS.

Sector Development Program

In addition to AbSec, FACS funds 13 other peak organisations through the Sector Development program to deliver a range of advocacy and capacity building activities to contribute to the development of a capable and sustainable service system which delivers positive outcomes for FACS clients and the broader community.

A number of these peaks are undertaking initiatives specifically aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities and to support the development of the Aboriginal sector. For example:

- CREATE are currently funded to deliver a range of activities to engage, support, and connect children and young people in NSW with a care experience, with a specific focus on Aboriginal children and young people.
- NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) are undertaking work to ensure Aboriginal leaders, services and communities are engaged and represented fairly in NCOSS work
- YFoundations are supporting Specialist Homelessness Services to deliver outcomes for Aboriginal young people through the provision of evidence-based services.
- Local Community Services Association (LCSA) have commenced work to build partnerships with Aboriginal organisations to build capacity and cultural competency within member organisations and strengthen relationships with local Aboriginal communities.

Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) is funded by FACS and managed by FACS Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR). It is the first large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia. Information on safety, permanency and wellbeing is being collected from various sources. The child developmental domains of interest are physical health, socio-emotional wellbeing and cognitive/learning ability. The POCLS provided new evidence for the Independent Review of Aboriginal Children in Out-of-Home Care (under embargo until all approvals are completed):

Statistical Analysis and Modelling & Family is Culture (FIC)

FACSIAR has supported the independent review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW through the provision of data and analysis. The purpose of the review is to identify reasons for the high and increasing rates of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in NSW. The review is aimed at improved implementation of the ATSI CPP and Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW).

A Review Tool was developed by the Aboriginal Care Review team in OSP to collect data on the out-of-home care experience of Aboriginal children who entered out-of-home care in 2015/16 (the review cohort). The Review Tool includes information that is not readily available from FACS administrative data such as Aboriginal consultation during case management and contact with family.

The independent review team (Family is Culture) developed a data reporting framework for the provision of data from the Review Tool and FACS administrative systems. Based on this reporting framework FACSIAR produced a detailed report on the experience of the children in the review cohort with the child protection system prior to entry into care, at the time of entry into care, while in care and on exit from care. The report also included overtime trends and the characteristics of children in out-of-home care by Aboriginality.