



QUEENSLAND FAMILY MATTERS SELF-AUDIT TOOL TRIAL FINDINGS

JULY 2020

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Executive Summary

In late 2019, three member organisations of the Queensland Family Matters Leadership group were the first across Australia to trial the *Family Matters National Self-Audit Tool Draft (July 2019)*.

This accountability tool was developed for signatories to the Family Matters campaign to identify their strengths and challenges in implementing the campaign principles and to identify activities to achieve the campaign vision and target.

Vision	Principles
All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.	1. Applying a child-focused approach
	2. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
Target	3. Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s right to live in culture
To eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care within a generation, by 2040.	4. Pursuing evidence-based responses
	5. Supporting, healing and strengthening families
	6. Challenging systemic racism and inequities

Organisations that participated in the trial had strong leadership, were active leaders in the campaign space, and endorsed the process of engaging an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lens in the application of the tool in their context. Organisations trialled the tool within specific program areas and with input from a wide cross section of organisational representatives.

Although the types of services the tool was applied to varied (early childhood, homelessness and domestic violence women’s service, and foster and kinship care), all identified common themes that arose during reflective discussions. The common areas of need identified include:

- Meaningful relationships and partnerships that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
- Frontline Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and other culturally competent, workers engaging with families
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services and specialists to refer families to
- Processes and tools specific to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to support practitioners to work more effectively
- Specific cultural workforce training and development to support increased and meaningful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

- Upholding the rights of the child and including the voice of the child within services with a primary focus on parents and carers (through better engagement, documentation, application of all elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle)
- Greater focus on addressing systemic issues, with actions including prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led solutions and ensuring a cultural lens is applied to all engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Greater accountability and evidence-based responses.

All organisations evidenced their commitment as campaign signatories to identifying more rigorous means to apply the principles and ways to refine service delivery to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families they support.

The tool reportedly provided a new way of thinking to gain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on the strengths, challenges and actions that organisations can take to work differently with families.

While the tool was effective for reflecting on practice, participants noted that they struggled to know at times if they were being asked for 'what they do and how they do it' or the 'why'. In its current form, the tool does not include benchmarking or a way for services to gauge their self-assessment and outcomes in relation to best practice. Participants noted it would be useful to have guidance on steps that can be taken along the way to fully achieving the actions identified for each principle in the Statement of Commitment, recognising that behavioural and cultural change within organisations and service systems is progressive over time.

The tool can benefit from further development of its methodology in order to become an industry standard of best practice and benchmarking. This would support better procurement processes through funding bodies as evidence of an organisations ability to deliver on the application of the Family Matters principles as outcomes of practice, similar to the Reconciliation Action Plan.

Recommendations for future development of the tool include:

1. Clarify purpose and rename accordingly
2. Establish a robust methodology for application of the principles
3. Indicate benchmarks or non-negotiable deliverables
4. Create a partnership process to provide external support and insight
5. Collectively advocate for systems change based on shared findings.

Analysis of the trial findings provides insight into the activities of the sector towards the campaign goal of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care

The findings also present gaps or priority areas that Family Matters may consider in developing strategies to advocate for systemic change and to further the impact of the campaign.

1. Family Matters Campaign Overview

Family Matters: Strong Communities. Strong Culture. Stronger Children is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. The goal of the campaign is to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care by 2040.

Family Matters is led by *SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children* and a national leadership group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country. It is supported by a strategic alliance of over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations. Each of these organisations has signed a Statement of Commitment to the campaign.

2. Self-Audit Tool Background

The *Family Matters National Self-Audit Tool Draft (July 2019) (Appendix 1)* was developed for signatories of the campaign to:

- identify any strengths and challenges in effectively implementing the principles and building blocks of the campaign
- provide opportunities to promote and share good practice
- identify additional activities and support needed to achieve outcomes.

The tool invites organisations to evaluate their level of commitment to the campaign by undertaking an evidence-based assessment. It is a key tool for organisational accountability to working in accordance with the Family Matters building blocks and principles as signatories to the campaign.

The tool includes background information on the campaign, details of the campaign's four building blocks and six principles, instructions on how to use the tool as well as who should use the tool and why.

3. Queensland Self-Audit Trial Overview

The *Family Matters National Self-Audit Tool Draft* was released in July 2019 and members of the Queensland Family Matters Leadership Group were invited to trial the tool. Following initial informal expressions of interest from group members, a formal letter of invitation was sent to interested non-government organisations (NGOs) in November 2019 to confirm their commitment (*Appendix 2. Self-Audit Tool Trial Invitation*).

Five non-government organisations expressed interest in the trial, however, only three completed full participation of the trial. Of the three organisations participating in the trial in late 2019, one organisation completed the tool within the first month and two organisations completed the tool within four months. This included gaining management support, briefing relevant staff and stakeholders on use of the tool, and having sufficient time for group discussion and collective input into the tool.

Each organisation appointed one main contact person who was also a member of the Queensland Family Matters Leadership Group to work with each other and the Qld Family Matters Coordinator throughout the trial. This trial group held monthly phone/ video conferences throughout the trial period and provided updates to both national and Queensland Family Matters leadership groups on their progress and findings.

This report reflects the trial participants collective feedback and reflections, including ideas for improvement of the tool. Quotes within this report are attributed to the collective group to preserve anonymity.

4. Key Findings

This section shares the key findings from the trial process and the trial outcomes (the completed tools from three organisations).

4.1 Factors affecting uptake of the Family Matters Self-Audit Tool

The organisations that participated in the trial had pre-existing leadership support for the Family Matters campaign, are active in the campaign space and reflect a genuine intent to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations to end over-representation of children in the statutory child protection system.

Primary concerns of organisations when choosing whether to participate in the trial included:

4.1.1 Clarity on the purpose of the tool

It was unclear where the tool fits in relation to the existing audit and compliance environment, scope of applicability (i.e. whole of organisation or program based), whether it is a practice reflection tool, or an audit of cultural competency or application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. From the outset, organisations considering participation suggested removing 'audit' from the name and considering a more user-friendly name.

4.1.2 Resources required

As a result of the purpose and scope of the tool not being clear it was difficult for organisations to determine if they had adequate resources to participate in the trial.

4.1.3 Prioritisation

Organisations with strong internal leadership support of the Family Matters campaign were more likely to prioritise use of the tool. In some cases, organisations needed to undertake research on the campaign to determine their involvement in the trial. This suggests that some signatories have signed up to the campaign but not progressed in their commitment to integrate corresponding actions that align to the campaign principles as outlined in the Family Matters Statement of Commitment.

4.1.4 Safety

An important agreement reached with trial participants to ensure safe engagement in the trial was an assurance that feedback will be provided collectively and will be non-identifiable to either the organisation providing the feedback or any family, community or staff that provided input through completing the tool and the trial.

4.2 Application of the Family Matters Self-Audit Tool

Trial organisations were both national and international non-government organisations, as such participants felt that whole-of-organisation use of the tool would not be feasible due to the size and reach of their workplaces.

As such, one organisation chose to look at their state-wide operations within one program area (foster care) while the other two organisations applied the tool to a specific program (early childhood in one case and women's homelessness and domestic violence in the other) within a localised geographic area.

Despite this variety of application all participants agreed that the tool required reflective discussion at multiple levels of the organisation, including frontline workers, senior management, and leadership groups.

All organisations took a team approach to completing the tool. There was always a mix of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous staff completing the tool, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in leadership roles provided mentoring and support to others.

Exact time spent to complete the tool was reportedly difficult to estimate and depended on internal management approval processes and other systems protocols. Most time spent was in gaining collective feedback from a number of different people, including holding group discussions and collecting follow up input from the various parties involved.

In one case, where the tool was applied by one program in a single area, it took approximately ten hours to complete over one month. In other cases, it took two to three months to complete the process. To assist organisations to plan for and implement the tool, it may help to have a better means to calculate overall time spent in completion.

Although a wide cross section of organisational representatives provided their insights trial participants reported that all layers of the organisation identified common themes.

The dual process of having strong leadership support to engage in the tool, and leadership that is committed to implementation of the campaign principles and building blocks. The tool would not have been as effective at a program level without leadership support as this support endorses the engagement of family and community voices and enacting the changes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and employees believe will improve outcomes for their children, families and communities.

4.3 Format of the tool

The group unanimously agreed the tool was easy to use and effectively guided teams to reflect on their organisational and practice engagement of the campaign principles. However, the tool presents as a highly subjective exercise due to not having existing benchmarks, examples, or outcomes-based questions to guide the process.

4.3.1 Layout and Style

Group feedback noted that it was not clear what type of information to capture, leaving the group wondering “do we want to know the why or the how?”.

The existing table format of the tool is traditional of an audit however, the tool presented a new way of thinking and was described as a reflective process primarily. As such, the group noted it may be more suitable to have “questions that get to the heart of how the organisation deals with issues”.

The ‘actions’ section produced a range of responses. In most cases organisations were able to identify at least one action to undertake, but in other cases up to 11 actions were identified. Feedback suggested in some cases ideas for action were already documented elsewhere, such as strategic plans, operational plans, reconciliation action plans, or other audit processes.

Participants cross-referenced other such internal plans during completion of the tool to ensure actions to be taken were documented, to avoid duplication.

Where no actions were identified it was reported that teams struggled as a result of this being the first and only tool or process to review the quality of cultural engagement with children, young people, their families and communities.

Prompt questions could be useful for organisations to generate ideas for critical actions that will be taken to further develop their commitment to the Family Matters campaign. Some potential examples are included in Appendix 4 which maps suggested questions to the six campaign principles. It is also important to consider more specific, measurable, time-based actions including identifying steps to take and accountability for bringing actions to fruition that organisations agreed to in the Family Matters Statement of Commitment.

4.3.2 Self-assessment scale

Of note, only one of three organisations opted to use the self-assessment scale (A: Always, B: Often, C. Sometimes, D. Rarely, E. Never). The standard rating identified was B. Often. Trial participants noted that rating scales are commonly used and highly familiar to this sector, however in this case it was difficult to interpret the rating scale without benchmarks of expected performance for each principle and for each assessment scale level.

Participants also noted a hesitation in using the rating scale, as they noted ratings would “depend on the program completing the tool” and not necessarily be reflective of the whole organisation. Omitting the self-assessment rating did not detract from the tool overall.

4.3.3 Case studies

The inclusion of case studies provided an evidence-base to demonstrating capability in relation to the relevant principle. However, again there was variation in how use of case



IT WAS THOUGHT PROVOKING, IT REQUIRED THE TEAM TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN BUILDING BLOCKS AND PRINCIPLES.

Trial group collective feedback

studies was applied. One organisation submitted an in-depth case study that demonstrated application of all principles in the practice approach and outcomes achieved by working with a family, while another organisation provided brief outcomes-based case summaries within specific principles. The third did not document case studies formally within the tool, rather they provided stories verbally during trial progress meetings.

One organisation explained they chose not to use an in-depth case study as they wanted *“the audit process to reflect reality (not just one case or what is in writing as being process/ policy) and to focus on systemic gaps”*.

Direct consent was obtained from the family for the single in-depth case study, while the generalised case outcomes did not require additional consent outside existing confidentiality and privacy agreements.

4.4 Challenges

The trial group collectively agreed that the tool considers whether a cultural lens is applied to service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. For some organisations that had primarily non-Indigenous workforces this posed some challenges.

While it was commented that *“to complete the tool you needed to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff input or it would have been a struggle to complete”*, it was also recognised that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective could be achieved through community input, such as through consultation with Elders, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parental advisory group or other relevant consumer or community representative process. To better engage community input, it may be desirable to design the tool in other languages as required.

As one trial participant explained, *“the purpose of an audit, to review what’s working, what’s not working, what can we improve, shouldn’t come down to the one Aboriginal worker”*.

The tool was found to be flexible and allowed individual organisations to decide how best to gather input to make informed assessments. However, the open-ended size and scope of the process did create a barrier for some organisations when considering uptake of the tool.

The results where the self-assessment scale was used, consisting of mostly B’s for Often, but also an ‘A for Always’ challenging racism, indicate there may be an element of cultural blindness and unconscious bias impacting on self-assessment ratings.

Enhancing functionality of the tool to garner more specific evidence of outcomes achieved, or perception of external parties such as community and an ‘expert other’ or critical friend, may assist to balance this self-perception phenomenon.

4.5 Emerging themes

Unanimously, trial participants found that using the tool assisted the organisation to think differently about service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This included assisting practitioners to reflect on application of all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Child Placement Principle and mainstream organisations to consider their application of the Family Matters principles and building blocks from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.

The tool instigated both reflection and review regarding existing organisational resources and whether policy, strategy and practice align.

As this trial included a small number (n=3) and single type of participant (large, non-Indigenous, non-government organisations), the common themes identified in the completed audit tools are referred to as 'emerging' and may not be reflective of their organisations as a whole, or of findings that would arise if a government service or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community service completed the tool.

Appendix 3. Emerging themes from application of the Family Matters principles shows the most common strengths, challenges and actions identified by trial participants.

Analysis of the findings determined the following emerging themes:

4.5.1 The desire to create meaningful relationships and partnerships that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations

Whilst policies, processes and tools exist there is currently no standard or quality control around implementing partnerships.

All organisations reported having the intent to create partnerships but were struggling in some cases to create relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and community organisations and to formalise partnerships.

A common challenge identified was engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, especially Elders. Actions identified prioritised opportunities for staff to improve the quality of their relationships and grow their connections in their local communities by engaging in a variety of external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities, including workshops, forums, and community meetings. One organisation identified the need to promote co-location of workers with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and another aims to create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents Advisory Group.

Reflections

“Partnerships were already there but the question was how to make it work sustainably and what does it look like, how to make it meaningful, this tool helped that process”

“Even if we had identified positions and key roles – there is still the issue of cultural competency, ongoing training”

“Our organisation covers a vast region and has such a large range of services, how do we ensure services are competent”

“Greater need for more consistent and structured process for mainstream NGOs around how to ensure cultural competency training, recruitment, policies, ensuring frontline workers have resources they need”

Best practice indicates that engagement skills improve when workers gain an understanding of the community's history and beliefs or worldviews, and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in two-way partnership.

Trial participants found that relationships and partnerships are part of the foundation for progressing toward the campaign goal, however the sector needs to build connections to work together for better outcomes for families.

SNAICC's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide to Support Implementation* shares best practice application of each of the principle elements and states "ultimately, the main aim of any partnership needs to be the eventual complete transfer of power and service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations so that self-determination is achieved" (page 37). While perhaps there were reflective discussions about this intent, no organisation within this trial identified this as a critical action in the completed tool.

4.5.2 Need for frontline Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and other culturally competent, workers engaging with families

Each participating organisation had a single identified staff role responsible for providing cultural advice. This included offering advice to teams and input on staff, program and policy development and overall cultural leadership to entire state-wide operations, as well as to other jurisdictions in some cases.

Organisations noted a limited number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff or staff with cultural capabilities that can work in complex frontline crisis or family support work. Where services specifically targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families there were Indigenous staff employed. However, employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across services was not evident.

The impact, or challenges, noted from limited numbers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff, or non-Indigenous staff with cultural capabilities, included missing opportunities to:

- engage family support networks
- apply a cultural lens to assessing risk and protective factors particularly in relation to child-rearing practices
- find family and community connections
- create quality cultural case plans or work towards reunification with family.

This contributes to children being fast tracked into the statutory system or remaining in the system longer than necessary.

For organisations that do not have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, the tool prompted conversation about how to grow connection to community, how to work with and partner with community to provide services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

4.5.3 Increased need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services and specialists

All services are aware of the importance of connecting families with culturally capable workers at the earliest point of needing support. This is addressed through referrals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and specialists where staffing limitations exist.

However, feedback noted the how the limited funding of early intervention and prevention services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations hinders referral options. Participants also noted a lack of specialist service providers that can meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as for housing, domestic and family violence, and therapeutic support.

Actions noted in the tools, such as co-location and collaborative case management with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, will go some of the way to recognising the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to drive local solutions to meet community needs however within existing funding constraints.

4.5.4 Processes and tools specific to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

All trial participants noted having protocols and policies for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes generalised policies such as Access and Equity and Anti-Discrimination. Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols were mentioned it was noted that there was limited understanding and experience amongst non-Indigenous colleagues of the cultural practices referred to and this resulted in limited application.

All have a Reconciliation Action Plan at least in draft and have had some staff opportunities for cultural competency training though not mandated or frequent.

For all participating organisations there was a trend to use one-size-fits-all practice approaches, frameworks and tools that do not apply a cultural lens to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This was the case even in the program targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, where instead the workers were empowered to use their “cultural knowledge and understanding to support the family in a culturally safe way” because their regular practice framework was not culturally appropriate (see Appendix 5).

Actions identified to respond included embedding current best practice, such as the *Child Protection Act*, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*, and *Aboriginal 8 Ways of Learning*. Also identified was a need to improve documenting quality evidence regarding working with Elders, traditional owners, parents, children and community to gain input into programs to meet family and community needs. Without sufficient documentation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s views and wishes are not clearly linked or evident in decision making processes or outcomes.

4.5.5 Workforce training and development needs particular to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Gaps in training and workforce development were repeatedly noted in each completed tool. The primary area participants highlighted for training is to improve workers ‘soft’ engagement skills with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family members, including understanding:

- sorry business and other cultural protocols
- the historical context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such as the Stolen Generations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices
- the importance and value of children’s voices.

4.5.6 Upholding the rights of the child and including the child's voice within services with a primary focus on parents and carers

A major hurdle participants noted in applying a child focused approach that protects children's right to live in culture is that many services are not funded to work directly with children or not as the primary client.

As a result, in responding to the issues that impact on children's wellbeing and life outcomes, services may never meet the child and are heavily reliant on the family's interpretation of the child's needs and views.

Participants stated it is often unclear from what point of the view the child's best interests is being interpreted. Action ideas included better engagement of children and young people, documentation of their views and wishes, and application of all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

4.5.7 Addressing systemic issues impacting on quality service delivery

Systemic issues, rather than challenges related to a specific, individual, or isolated factor, that impact on quality service delivery were also highlighted.

Many examples are provided in *Appendix 3. Emerging themes from application of the Family Matters principles*. In summary:

- without being funded to work directly with children, services feel unable to gain children's views on decisions impacting them, despite it being evidenced as best practice and part of the Family Matters principles
- one-size fits all practice approaches and frameworks are often applied to service delivery despite a significant proportion of clientele being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Standard practice is to use mainstream frameworks that lack a cultural lens
- tender processes do not currently prioritise funding of services that evidence their application of the Family Matters principles or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. Currently mainstream organisations compete for funding with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and this creates tension with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and can at times limit partnership approaches
- services frequently support families where placement decisions, cultural case plans, and genograms have not been completed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input
- shortage of early intervention and prevention services, including safe accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and children
- few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander frontline workers in child protection agencies maintains families fears or apprehension to engage due to intergenerational trauma.

Alongside this, there were actions identified to improve accountability and overcome challenges experienced within the current operating environment. Some examples of actions identified include:

- requirement to apply a cultural lens from first engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families by all services including child safety
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on interview panels
- increase focus and services for prevention

- children being able to be a client of Link-Up (for family finding), or a process for child safety or community services to give consent so a child can investigate their family history.

Whilst systemic issues were noted in the findings, the difficulty to address these issues outside of internal service improvements within organisations was emphasised.

This could indicate that attempting to influence the external environmental factors impeding quality service delivery may be considered out of scope or too risky by the organisation.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is aimed at support of keeping children safely placed with family and kin, however, the self-audit tool provided limited insight into the overall organisational context in application of the principal.

For community organisations, the ability to engage with family and have influence in placement decisions is often hindered by decision making having already occurred with little to no family finding efforts. This appears to be due to inconsistent application of the Child Placement Principle, particularly by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.

Organisations noted a need for “greater collaboration with child safety to address the cycle of children entering the child protection system due to risk factors and incurring greater trauma from entering the system and placement decisions. In many cases this could have been avoided with better access to quality, culturally safe services at the first point of contact.

The group agreed that the tool presents the opportunity for mainstream organisations to identify systemic challenges and advocate for change.

4.5.8 Accountability and evidence-based responses

Participating organisations showed strengths in seeking and responding to family feedback and making service improvements based on this feedback. One service is looking to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent advisory group and increase involvement of Elders and Traditional Owners in service activities. The process of completing the tool presented an opportunity for organisations to strengthen their cultural capability and accountability by reflecting on how they contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families receiving the right services at the right time.

Overall, it was found that the tool required organisations to critically reflect and be transparent in acknowledging how they are performing in engaging communities and families.

5. Broader considerations for Family Matters campaign

The trial group found the tool highlighted gaps and challenges in meeting the campaign goal that could inform the Family Matters campaign efforts to advocate for systemic changes. There are also sector development concerns that could be addressed collectively rather than worked on individually through organisational action plans.

- a) The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and organisations to lead and develop responses for children and families is not translating to increased resourcing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations or greater employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.
- b) The tool highlighted a need for organisations to create Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and partnership strategies with measurable targets across all levels and program areas.
- c) Understanding and being aware of intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential for services to be able to support families heal with the support of their cultural and family connections. However, cultural learning and development appeared to be limited to ad-hoc cultural competency training rather than mandatory, ongoing and localised opportunities to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.
- d) The best interests of the child appeared to rarely be inclusive of the child’s voice and may not have included the biological parents for a child in care. Service collaboration occurs in some instances with services funded to work directly with children, but as evidenced in the results of this trial the child’s voice is not well documented or integrated into service responses. Recent research by the Institute of Child Protection in the Domestic and Family Violence field further demonstrates this challenge.
- e) Children require workforces better skilled in upholding children’s rights and engaging them in a trauma-aware, healing informed approach.
- f) Training needs to provide more than just the ‘how’ but also the ‘why’. For example, skills can be taught, and tools shared to engage children’s voices, but workers need to understand the value of children’s voices in order to protect children’s right to participate in decisions that affect them and their right to live in culture. This includes building frontline workers ability to fully implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
- g) Actions to implement community-led evaluation that resources Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research or elevates the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the equivalent of western theories and evidence were not evident within trial organisations.
- h) This highlights the need to develop community-led program evaluation that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the design and implementation of evaluation and as central to the interpretation of the outcomes. This would ensure that programs targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are effective, have strong cultural foundations and continue to build an effective evidence base.

6. Future development of the tool

After completing the self-audit tool, organisations were keen to explore how they fared in relation to the six principles.

While completing the tool internally was productive and informative, it was also subjective. As such participants queried if there could be a pathway to access feedback to further inform continuous improvement plans.

Essentially, they were interested in benchmarking and in receiving feedback on whether there are further steps for development to improve service to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that they had not considered.

This is reflective of trial participants' high engagement with the tool and their reported plans to continue using the tool in other areas (programs, geographic areas) of their organisations. All confirmed their intention to use the tool annually as indicated in process steps outlined on page 4 of the draft tool. The overall consensus was that it would more effective to create a methodology for the tool that embeds it as best practice to use on an ongoing and consistent basis rather than on an ad hoc, one program at a time, basis.

In moving from a trial to a nationally implemented tool, it is worth noting that during the trial the Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women began exploring using the tool to improve cultural competency within government teams responding to the safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Government application of the tool also became a possibility in South Australia during the trial period.

It is important that the tool be further developed as a matter of priority given the current interest and uptake amongst governments and community services, and its scope to address systemic factors impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The Family Matters principles and building blocks are not a single agenda. All governments and organisations who provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have a role to play to progress the campaign principles in a way that is defined, measured and actioned.

Currently the tool is effective at guiding reflection, however to expand influence and become a tool for change it needs a more robust methodology, like that of the Reconciliation Action Plan, that sets out benchmarks and measures to achieve over a phased approach.

Moreover, the tool needs to engage external partners, such as peak bodies, that can assist organisations in developing their understanding and application of the campaign principles. Such a partnership model will require resourcing to roll out effectively.

Currently there is nothing in place to measure service impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. As it is, the tool does not link service findings to evidence-based benchmarks that are directly mapped to outcomes the Family Matters campaign signatories seek to achieve.

7. Recommendations

The trial group recommends expanding the tool to include benchmarks and measures against each of the six campaign principles, as well as to link with partners for guidance and input, such as peak bodies. This may involve a trial again where the methodology is implemented under a partnership model so that

organisations have external support and insight in completing the tool. Specific recommendations to achieve this are outlined below.

1. Clarify purpose and rename accordingly

The tool provides the sector the only existing evidence-based assessment of implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and Family Matters principles and building blocks. Clarifying this will elevate its status and importance as being complementary to the current auditing and compliance environment. In practice during the trials, it effectively led teams to consider the 'why' as well as the 'how' to meet targets in accordance with the Family Matters building blocks.

It naturally follows that the name of the tool should accurately reflect its purpose. The name of the tool was changed to Family Matters Reflective Practice Tool during the trial; however it may need to be considered again depending on final methodology developed.

2. Establish a robust methodology for application of the principles

The tool requires further development of its methodology in order to become an industry standard of best practice and benchmarking that would ideally be reflected in procurement processes through funding bodies as evidence of an organisations ability to deliver on the application of the Family Matters principles as outcomes of practice, similar to the Reconciliation Action Plan. A phased approach is recommended, where reflection is the starting point and grows into measurable targets to achieve over time.

The tool was conceived of in Queensland in 2018 and from its inception it has been clear that it should not be a compliance tool. People engage more genuinely and with good intent when a tool is not compulsory but is a choice to undertake based on alignment of organisational values and vision to that of the Family Matters campaign and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

3. Indicate benchmarks and non-negotiable deliverables

Similar to the Reconciliation Action Plan model, the tool needs a robust accountability mechanism with non-negotiable deliverables across a period of time relevant to the scope of change expected.

Providing benchmarks and non-negotiable deliverables will clarify evidence-based action steps that demonstrate working in accordance with the principles and building blocks. Such a method will create a more targeted and specific, itemised approach to addressing strategic goals as well as measuring outcomes.

In addition to undertaking international and national research, it may be useful to conduct a whole of sector online survey regarding the Family Matters actions listed in the Statement of Commitment to inform the development of benchmarks or deliverables across a phased approach.

4. Create a partnership process to provide external support and insight

Undertaking the tool in partnership with a peak body or other industry expert as part of the methodology will assist to balance the subjective nature of the tool and to include external expertise. A partnership approach will support organisations to expand their thinking and develop new ways of working that assist organisations to grow further than what may be achieved through their own lens.

The partnership model will also build in formal and informal feedback against measurable benchmarks which was noted as lacking in the trial.

5. Collectively advocate for systems change based on shared findings

The findings present an opportunity to measure sector growth over time towards the campaign goal of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care and to advocate for systemic change accordingly.

The findings highlight long-term issues as well as solutions that can be harnessed into collective action and a unified voice for everyone concerned about the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Anonymity can be maintained while also being accountable to the sector by publishing non-identifiable data and findings for whole of sector access.

Findings can be shared through the annual Family Matters report and presented to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders such as the Queensland First Children and Families Board.

Appendix 1. Family Matters National Self-Audit Tool Draft (July 2019)



National Self-Audit Tool Draft

Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have grown up safe, well and cared for in their families, communities and cultural traditions for thousands of years. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to thrive within their families, communities and cultures. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face ongoing challenges that stem from colonisation and its inter-generational impacts. More than twenty years since the ground-breaking Bringing Them Home report on the experiences of the Stolen Generations was released it is devastating that the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC) continue to rise. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 11 times more likely than other Australian children to be removed from their families and placed in OOHC.

Our campaign

Family Matters: Strong Communities. Strong Culture. Stronger Children is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Family Matters is led by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and a group of eminent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country. It is supported by a strategic alliance of over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations. The goal of the campaign is to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC by 2040.

Signing the Family Matters Statement of Commitment reflects a genuine intent to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their organisations to end this over-representation. The national self-audit tool has been developed for signatories

of the Family Matters campaign to deeply reflect on their practice on an annual basis and identify any strengths and challenges in effectively implementing the principles and building blocks of the campaign to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe, well and cared for in their families, communities and cultures.

Campaign building blocks

The Family Matters building blocks have been designed on the basis of evidence, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and experience of what is needed to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child development, well-being and safety – which are interdependent and interrelated issues, requiring a holistic strategy of redress. Addressing only one without paying attention to the others will, over time, impede the achievement of sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The building blocks are as follows:



1. All families enjoy access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive.

Early intervention is required to strengthen families and provide long-term social and economic benefits by preventing trajectories that lead to health problems, criminalisation, and child protection intervention. Service engagement and availability barriers must also be addressed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are able to access a full range of culturally safe and acceptable universal early childhood, education, health, housing, legal and other social services. High-quality trauma-informed practice needs to be applied in all states and territories across family support, child protection, health, education, and related adult services under the leadership and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community representatives must genuinely be included in the decisions that are made about their children at all stages of child protection decision making. Government and mainstream service providers need to progressively step away from direct service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and instead actively hand service delivery and decision-making responsibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.



3. Law, policy and practice in child and family welfare are culturally safe and responsive.

A transformation of services is required to create a culturally safe and competent child health and wellbeing sector. This requires the development of laws, policies and practices that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and reflect a priority to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC. The agenda of all services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children must include: full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; amendment of policies and procedures which discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and the development of cultural competence across policies, staff and service provision.



4. Governments and services are accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Efforts to address over-representation must include public measures of accountability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the oversight of reforms, including the development and monitoring of measures of success. All governments, services and institutions must prioritise the removal of racism, cultural blindness, and direct and indirect discrimination towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By completing this self-audit tool, signatories can build on their accountability and the audit can be used as a means for the Family Matters leadership group to monitor progress towards the overall campaign goal.

Your commitment to the campaign

All signatories of the Family Matters campaign have made a commitment to working in accordance with the following six key principles, and to implementing all corresponding actions (included in the self-audit tool below):

1. Applying a child focused approach
2. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
3. Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture
4. Pursuing evidence based responses
5. Supporting, healing and strengthening families

6. Challenging systemic racism and inequities

What is the self-audit tool and why use it?

The Family Matters self-audit tool has been structured around the above six core principles and their corresponding actions. At a broader level, these principles and actions support the four building blocks of the campaign. It is an expectation that organisations will complete each of the assessment frameworks for all six campaign principles on an annual basis. Annual completion of the self-audit tool will provide a consistent means to promote and share good practice with other services, reflect on areas for improvement and encourage consideration of additional activities and support where needed. Regular use of the tool will also generate valuable progress information to feed into broader evaluation of redressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations have had negative experiences of tokenistic collaborations with non-Indigenous organisations. This has led to a level of mistrust that governments and mainstream services may sign on to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campaigns to ‘tick the box’ of cultural competence without engaging with the deeper commitment of the campaign. Tokenistic involvement does not lead to better services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Tokenism can, in fact, hold up progress as organisations that appear to be culturally responsive but fail to adjust their service delivery create deeper levels of mistrust, maintain power imbalances and fail to promote reconciliation.

In light of this, the self-audit tool is designed to push further than a simple ‘tick box’ exercise. It is a conversation starting and practice building tool that can help you explore your deeper commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve long-term outcomes for children and families and establish how this can be realised in practice.

Who should use the self-audit tool?

All organisations that are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are encouraged to complete this self-audit tool. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe, happy, healthy and able to thrive is a shared responsibility. We can only reach our goal with the commitment and action of every individual, family, community and organisation, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, who touch the lives of children. The self-audit tool holds particular relevance for non-Indigenous organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as it is a supportive measure to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and responsive services. A whole of practice approach is required to meaningfully engage with this self-audit tool. This approach will look different in each organisation but could, for example, include executive, policy, managerial and direct practice leaders.

How to use the self-audit tool

Below are suggested stages for completing the self-audit tool, including ideas to assist in carrying out each stage.

Stage 1: Come together to discuss and reflect on the values that underpin your organisations commitment to Family Matters

Start by checking-in about why you have signed the Statement of Commitment and what is important to you in the way you go about fulfilling this commitment.

Stage 2: Complete the self-audit tool

Work through each of the self-assessment frameworks to deeply reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation in implementing the corresponding actions of the campaign principles.

Stage 3: Ensure you plan the way forward to respond to the audit outcomes

This is a critical stage to ensure that plans are made and action is taken to address the issues and priorities identified in the audit. Talk through priority actions and assign responsibility and timeframes for completing them.

Stage 4: Share the outcomes of your self-audit tool to the Family Matters leadership group (optional)

We invite you to provide the outcomes of your self-audit tool to the Family Matters leadership group in your state or territory and/or to the national leadership group. This information will be used to reflect on the progress of the campaign and a member of the relevant leadership group may contact you to discuss any challenges you are facing in carrying out your commitment to the campaign. With the permission of services who submit the outcomes of their self-audit, Family Matters may also publish case studies of best practice. Family Matters may also publish de-identified data collected through the audit process.

Suggested resources

The following resources may assist you with identifying evidence to support your assessments and establish actions for improvement. They can be accessed online through the [Family Matters](#) and [SNAICC](#) websites.

- [The Family Matters Roadmap](#)
- [The Family Matters Report](#)
- [Understanding and Applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#)
- [The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide To Support Implementation](#)





National Self-Audit Tool Draft

Date:

Name of organisation:

Names and positions of people completeing this audit tool:







PRINCIPLE 1: APPLYING A CHILD FOCUSED APPROACH				
<p>We recognise that in all actions concerning children their best interests should be the paramount consideration and that ensuring their safety is essential. Advancing the best interests of children requires the holistic realisation of their rights, including rights to safety, family, housing, health, education, culture and participation. We understand that the best interests of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child can only be properly determined with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p>				
Accordingly, signatories commit to:	Ensuring that the best interests of the child, informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is the paramount consideration in all decisions about the care and protection of children.	Promoting the inclusion of children’s voices in all decisions that affect them.		
Assessment: A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never				
Evidence & case studies to support this assessment Please attach additional pages if more space is required.	Strengths:	Challenges:	Strengths:	Challenges:

Recommended actions for improvement		
Action plan 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement?	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Relevant Building Blocks	 Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.  Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.	 Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.  Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.

PRINCIPLE 2: ENSURING THAT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATE IN AND HAVE CONTROL OVER DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR CHILDREN

We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the strengths and the right to lead change for their own children. Governments and services should provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations to participate in and drive decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

<p>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</p>	<p>Building and transferring capacity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to provide services that respond to the needs of their communities.</p>		<p>Ensuring policies and mechanisms to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in all decisions that affect them.</p>		<p>Recognising the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to local issues.</p>	
<p>Assessment: A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never</p>						
<p>Evidence & case studies to support this assessment</p> <p>Please attach additional pages if more space is required.</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>

Recommended actions for improvement					
Action plan 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement?	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.		
Relevant Building Blocks	 Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.  Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.	 Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.	 Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.  Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.  Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.		






PRINCIPLE 3: PROTECTING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO LIVE IN CULTURE

We recognise that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connections to their family, community and culture are critical to their wellbeing and positive self-identity. We also recognise the evidence that cultural and community networks support safety for children, and that continuity of cultural identity promotes healthy development. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to practise their cultures with their families and communities.

<p>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</p>	<p>Promoting and enabling the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in line with its intent to maintain quality cultural connections for children throughout their involvement with child protection systems.</p>	<p>Developing the capability of organisations and staff to work in culturally safe and competent ways to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.</p>
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<p>Assessment: A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never</p>		
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<p>Evidence & case studies to support this assessment</p> <p>Please attach additional pages if more space is required.</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>
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<p>Recommended actions for improvement</p>		
<p>Action plan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4.
<p>Relevant Building Blocks</p>	<p> Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.</p> <p> Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making</p> <p> Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.</p>	<p> Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.</p> <p> Building block 4: Governments and services held accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>

PRINCIPLE 4: PURSUING EVIDENCE BASED RESPONSES

We believe that in responding to the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems, our efforts should be based on the evidence of what works. This evidence base critically includes the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.




<p>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</p>	<p>Respecting and practically applying research findings on what is effective to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, recognising the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in research to the quality of the evidence base.</p>		<p>Listening to the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on how best to respond to the needs of their children and families, including by resourcing and supporting community-led program evaluation and research.</p>	
<p>Assessment A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never</p>				
<p>Evidence & case studies to support this assessment</p> <p>Please attach additional pages if more space is required.</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>

<p>Recommended actions for improvement</p>		
<p>Action plan</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4.
<p>Relevant Building Blocks</p>	<p> Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.</p> <p> Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.</p>	<p> Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.</p> <p> Building block 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making</p> <p> Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.</p>




PRINCIPLE 5: SUPPORTING, HEALING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

We recognise that family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s social, cultural and emotional wellbeing and is their most important life-long support. We acknowledge the unique need for healing supports to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma on families that has resulted from experiences of colonisation, the Stolen Generations and other discriminatory government policies. We recognise and respect the evidence that shows that early intervention is critical to heal and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for their children and ensure they thrive.

<p>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</p>	<p>Promoting and driving increased early intervention supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and increased proportional investment in early intervention as compared to OOHC.</p>	<p>Supporting and promoting a priority to safely reunify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families wherever it is possible to do so.</p>		
<p>A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never</p>				
<p>Evidence & case studies to support this assessment</p> <p>Please attach additional pages if more space is required.</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>	<p>Strengths:</p>	<p>Challenges:</p>

Recommended actions for improvement		
Action plan 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement?	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Relevant Building Blocks	 Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.	 Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.  Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.

PRINCIPLE 6: CHALLENGING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INEQUITIES				
We acknowledge that the current challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families result from a history of injustice and racism that remains embedded within the laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions.				
Accordingly, signatories commit to:	Taking actions to ensure law, policy and practice are designed to respond to the root causes of poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.		Challenging racism where we see or experience it in laws, policies, procedures or behaviours.	
Assessment: A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes D: Rarely E: Never				
Evidence & case studies to support this assessment Please attach additional pages if more space is required.	Strengths:	Challenges:	Strengths:	Challenges:

<p>Recommended actions for improvement</p>		
<p>Action plan</p> <p>1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports are required? 4. How will you measure improvement?</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>	<p>1. 2. 3. 4.</p>
<p>Relevant Building Blocks</p>	<p> Building block 1: Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.</p> <p> Building block 3: Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.</p>	<p> Building block 4: Governments and services held accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>

Thank you for completing the Family Matters National self-audit tool. If you would like to submit the outcomes of your audit please forward it to (section to be completed).

Appendix 2. Self-Audit Tool Trial Invitation



21 November 2019

RE: Family Matters Self-Audit Tool Trial

Dear Family Matters signatory,

Thank you for considering trialling the National Family Matters Self-Audit Tool (July 2019 draft attached) that is developed for signatories of the Family Matters campaign, Australia's national campaign to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and ensure children grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. We are providing this letter to clarify what the trial entails and we are asking signatories to notify us if they will commit to the trial by **29 November 2019**.

The purpose of the National Family Matters Self-Audit Tool is to deeply reflect on your practice and identify any strengths and challenges in effectively implementing the principles and building blocks of the campaign. This includes reviewing your application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) and this is currently the only tool for reflecting on practice against the ATSICPP five elements: connection, participation, prevention, partnership and placement.

Organisations have autonomy in deciding how best to use the tool. For instance, you may identify you have capacity to trial the tool in one particular service location (e.g. Beenleigh or Emerald) or within a single program area (e.g. a playgroup or intensive family support service). It is not anticipated that services will have capacity to use the tool to audit the entire organisation, nor that the tool is best applied in that manner.

The tool is designed to be complimentary to the relevant National and or State standards under which you work. Ideas for practice improvement that arise from use of the Family Matters Self-Audit Tool may co-exist within a Human Services Quality Framework action plan or Reconciliation Action Plan, or be implemented within a revised operational plan. Using the tool also presents an opportunity to highlight and celebrate achievements within teams.

We ask that you nominate a key contact person to lead your organisation in using the tool. Your contact person will be supported by the Family Matters Qld Campaign Coordinator and can receive peer support from key contact people trialling the tool in other organisations. As the tool is in draft form and trial stage, we ask that your key contact person feedback their

learnings and recommendations for improvements to the tool to the Family Matters Qld Campaign Coordinator. The coordinator will provide collective feedback from all trial participants in Queensland to the national Family Matters leadership group.

While you will complete the tool at your own pace, we ask trial participants to provide some feedback by end of January 2020 to be compiled and shared with the national Family Matters Leadership group at their meeting in February 2020.

Questions for feedback will focus on usability of the tool and will include:

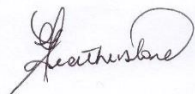
- Did the tool contribute to starting conversations of relevance?
- Was it easy to use?
- Is it worded and formatted in a way that effectively addresses the six principles and four building blocks of the campaign?
- Is it worded and formatted in a way that effectively measures impact of policies, programs and practice?
- Does the wording and layout of the tool help your organisation explore deeper commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve long-term outcomes for children and families and establish how this can be realised in practice?
- What could be improved to enhance use of the tool to reflect on areas of improvement and encourage consideration of additional activities and support where needed?
- Who completed the tool (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff) and from what basis were decisions made?
- What was required in time and staffing to complete the tool? Note if this was done within current workload or if additional hours were provided/ or alterations to workload to accommodate this task.
- What were the pitfalls and benefits (and ethical issues if any) in using case studies?

As noted on page five of the Family Matters Self-Audit Tool, sharing outcomes of your self-audit tool to the Family Matters leadership group is optional. With the permission of services who submit outcomes of their self-audit, Family Matters may publish de-identified case studies of best practice and de-identified data collected through the audit process.

To commit to, or discuss, the trial please contact the Family Matters Qld Campaign Coordinator, Eva Ruggiero, at qldfamilymatters@gatsicpp.com.au by 29 November 2019.

Thank you for your consideration and for being a supporter of the Family Matters campaign.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Gerald Featherstone

Queensland Family Matters Co-Chair

Email: qldfamilymatters@gatsicpp.com.au

Mobile: 0424 779 846

Address: Gabba Towers Level 11, 411 Vulture St, Woolloongabba QLD 4102

Appendix 3. Emerging themes from application of the Family Matters principles

The table below shows amalgamated findings populated from the tools completed during the trial.

Principle	Strengths	Challenges	Actions
Principle 1 Applying a child-focused approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes and practice tools easily identifiable and evidence informed (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), Online Child Protection Guide, feedback, consultation and review processes) Cultural training for some workers and carers One identified cultural staff member available to support teams guided by Child Protection Act and ATSICPP Whole-of-organisation plans such as Reconciliation Action Plans, Children and Young People’s strategies, strategic plans that include cultural competence Belief in clients as experts in own lives and empowered to make informed, age appropriate decisions Referrals and some collaborative case management with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Execution of processes and practice varies and depends on worker experience, cultural awareness, skill and ability No Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander frontline staff Inconsistent understanding of the value of children’s voices and, due to this, lack of documentation of children’s voices Sometimes not asking the young people themselves [due to being funded to work with adults] and missing a part of the story or who else they may be connected to Best interests/ child focused – needs to be more thought through from family law and ATSICPP perspective Limited training on child protection tools, cultural differences in risk adversity, culture as protective factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide cultural awareness training on a localised and ongoing basis Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally competent workforce with soft-skills (able to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, Elders, community workers) Implement and monitor cultural capabilities, systems, targets or goals Develop and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander frameworks into service delivery (e.g. Aboriginal 8 ways of learning)

Principle	Strengths	Challenges	Actions
<p>Principle 2 Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking, making referrals to and attempting to establish partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) • One organisation expressed commitment not to competitively tender with ACCOs • Working with teams and carers to link in with ACCOs to increase carer supports and improve rapport between carers and ACCOs • Responsive to community needs and program development is driven by family feedback • Organisational values, policies (e.g. Access and Equity, code of conduct) and plans (e.g. Reconciliation, strategic) demonstrate commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families • Indigenous position available in each organisation at a senior level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations are in early days of establishing partnerships, no reference to building and transferring capacity to ACCOs, stronger connections and improved quality of relationships • Workers do not know Elders • Systems barriers to having a lens of connection to family, community and country when primary focus is on adult situations and what is available (in terms of housing and court outcomes) • Referral made to ACCOs but limited joint case management or joint assessment, connection made but not collaboration • Partnering with community Murri services is one avenue but not always available within timeframe or internal Indigenous staffing not always available within timeframe (only one identified staff member, not frontline), ACCOs at capacity • Tools exist (RAP, protocols, policy) but there is limited understanding of purpose and intent, self-determination, reunification, Child Placement Principle • Time and budget constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more targeted and strategic in partnerships with ACCOs • Strengthen and formalise partnerships through MOUs with ACCOs • Cultural case plans to be completed with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prior to placement decisions being made • Improve quality of existing processes, policies, tools and standards to guide performance against this principle • Mandatory, localised cultural competency training • Fund more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services

Principle	Strengths	Challenges	Actions
<p>Principle 3 Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to live in culture • Culturally safe, respectful, inclusive environment realised through parent and family involvement • Staff are encouraged to develop cultural competency • The intent and policies for this exist • Where undertaken, working with ACCOs improves access to services and connecting children in foster care to family, community and country • Effective leadership, guidance and support available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander frontline staff • Risk screening through online child protection guide may identify cultural needs but not followed up or measured, protective factors looked at more than cultural factors • Missed opportunities when first engagement with child or family does not gather information on family or cultural connections, or make connection with community (ACCOs or people such as Elders) • Limited understanding of sorry business, cultural protocols, Stolen Generations, historical context and limited peer learning • Systems blocks to connecting children with cultural heritage and family history searching due to role of child safety or lack of engagement of biological parents • Shortage of safe accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and children • Resources to access frontline Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialists • Not using Family First Housing • Lack of skills and experience applying child's rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need strategies to apply a cultural lens from first engagement (by all services, including child safety) such as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy and ongoing cultural competency training for frontline workers servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families • Create strong, positive relationships with local Elders groups • Maintain currency of practice knowledge and share learnings across teams • Organise NAIDOC, Reconciliation and Family Matters National Week of Action events • Adopt Family First Housing Approach • Mandatory to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person on all interview panels • Increase focus and services for prevention

Principle	Strengths	Challenges	Actions
Principle 4 Pursuing evidence based responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of trauma-informed practice as best practice • Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle • Continuous improvement for building referral pathways • Growing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and partnerships with ACCOs, Elders, community groups and Aboriginal Medical Services • Greater presence at cross-agency network meetings • Ongoing attempts are made to gain information and connections to community Elders and with Aboriginal and Strait Islander programs • Organisational values and safe environment are responsive and inclusive for community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and trauma-informed practice • Uncertainty if evidence-base is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander informed or developed • Lack of regular, mandatory cultural competency training that would support respecting and applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and valuing resourcing community-led research and evaluation • Need stronger relationships – formalise partnerships with MOU then maintain and sustain over time regardless of staff changes • Limited practice tools specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, e.g. culturally relevant case plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain regular visits to ACCOs (at least monthly) and increase number of staff with strong relationships (not just identified staff) • Enhance partnerships to resource ACCOs to lead community-based research and evaluation • Workers supported with training and practice framework and tools specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, then document the evidence of good practice and outcomes
Principle 5 Supporting, healing and strengthening families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known by community members as a service of choice • Access for families to culturally appropriate support achieved via partnerships with ACCOs • Working towards reunification increasing via partnerships • Targeted practice to support cultural and emotional development of children and families, and to create culturally inclusive practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to advocate for a culturally safe style of support, but as an exception and not standard practice (standard practice is to use mainstream frameworks which lacks cultural aspects) • Exploring informal family supports to link with or strengthen, instead of being quick to refer to services/ community organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on how to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, trauma training and tools for practice (including Child Placement Principle) • Building relationships with other community services, workers and

Principle	Strengths	Challenges	Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral information readily known by staff on community services with specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, and encouraged as first point of contact and offered throughout support if initially declined • Effective safety planning with families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some families do not want to engage due to intergenerational trauma • Limited co-location of workers in Aboriginal community organisations 	<p>Elders to collaboratively support families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering with families • Increase co-location with Aboriginal community organisations
<p>Principle 6 Challenging systemic racism and inequities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation Action Plans • Cultural training • Rewriting policies to reflect needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people • Integrating cultural experiences and learning through programs and resources for families and staff • Support and advocacy provided in areas that are known to be systemically racist (housing, child safety) • Worker awareness of white privilege, racism, challenges experienced by First Nations peoples, how to work toward reconciliation • Being conscious of, and escalating any, racism or mistreatment to management as per policy • Awareness of children’s right to enjoy culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing the mindset of families (resulting from a history of injustice and racism) • Limited specialist services (e.g. housing) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people • Cycle of children entering child protection systems from externalised risk factors (housing, trauma), and experiencing greater trauma and risks from the system itself, and consequently escalating intervention of the child protection system • For children who are under guardianship of the state, family searching (through Link Up) requires consent of child safety in place of parent, but no process in place with Child Safety and Link Up to enable this (systemic gap) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review whether the organisation has adequate internal processes to raise challenges • Engage Indigenous families in Parent Advisory Group • Increase long-term, safe and stable housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families • Increase collaboration with child safety to address the cycle of children entering the system due to externalised risk factors (e.g. Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness) • Arrangement for Link Up to gain consent from child or from Child Safety for genograms

Appendix 4. Suggested questions and outcomes linked to six principles

Key questions for organisations completing the Self-Audit Tool:

- Are there documented strategies for promoting cultural identity?
- Are there documented strategies for ensuring family identity and relationships, including contact, are maintained?
- Are there documented strategies for sibling contact?
- Is placement limited in any way (access to services for complex needs, family availability, carer availability) that directly impacts on ability to have ideal placement? What needs to happen to improve this?
- Does the organisation have a policy or practice framework in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle? Family Matters building blocks or principles?
- Is your service located in a culturally safe space? Does the area carry historical or current threats to people that may impact on feeling safe to access the venue?
- Is culturally appropriate counselling or support available through your service or in your area? For families? For staff?
- How do you seek feedback and instruction from your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community?
- Do you have agreed ways of working or cultural protocols with Elders, Traditional Owners or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations (CCO) in your service area?
- In funding contracts, do you specify how you will work to ensure culturally appropriate services are provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners (which may mean declining portions of funding and identifying that to be provided to an CCO)?
- What steps are taken/ can be taken to shift and balance investment? To empower parents, families and communities? To share power, responsibility and accountability?
- Is culture recognised as a protective factor in assessments, plans, reviews?
- Is there a workplace practice of innovating/ disrupting; building evidence and adjusting (active learning or continuous improvement)?

Mapping of outcomes against each principle

Principle 1: Applying a child focussed approach

- Full implementation of the Child Placement Principle and Child's Rights
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people determining the best interests of the child and this being documented with variations noted.
- Children's voices seen and heard through all service support and decision making, including in documentation.

Principle 2: Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being cared for by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

- Partnerships that transfer resources and capacity for decision making related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to ACCOs.
- Children being placed with kin and reunified with family.

Principle 3: Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture

- Full implementation of the Child Placement Principle and Child's Rights
- Children being placed with kin and reunified with family.
- All services engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being culturally capable and recognising culture as safety.

Principle 4: Pursuing evidence based responses

- Research generated from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and community controlled organisations.
- Community-led program evaluation
- Service improvements are made based on service user feedback and best practice drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sources.

Principle 5: Supporting, healing and strengthening families

- Healing and strengthening of families is embedded in all aspects of the service, for all family members, including addressing past injustices.
- Children in out of home care are reunited with family.
- Children are placed with or maintained within family and families receive timely and culturally appropriate support.

Principle 6: Challenging systemic racism and inequities

- People are encouraged and supported in challenging racism by leadership teams.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have influence and resources to affect change and improve service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- Organisations reflect on whether their policies and practices are equitable and culturally appropriate. They take action to be accountable and to address systemic issues.

Appendix 5. Case work and practice examples

The following examples were collected from three completed self-audit tools completed by three organisations during the trial of the *Family Matters Self-Audit Tool Draft* in Queensland between 2019 and 2020.

1. Developing and implementing a home visiting project with Queensland Health to support Indigenous families to connect to the playgroup
2. The delivery of play based early childhood activities, parent support group strategies (modelling, scaffolding, capacity building and reinforcement), early learning programs (communication, behavioural and emotional development) and child social development activities in a culturally safe and inclusive environment.
3. The playgroup has been a space for a new mum who needed to socialise both herself and her daughter who is about 2.5 years old. This mum had a new baby and her husband had taken time off work to be with her and the children. The first 2 weeks all of the family attended the group, then dad was coming with the 2.5 year old daughter alone. This continued for a few weeks, then dad shared that his wife was struggling with some post-natal depression and he was concerned for her. He stated that she really felt that the group was her family and really wanted to come back to the group when she was feeling better. The mum did attend for two more weeks and then over a number of weeks we noticed that she was not attending again.

Staff contacted the family to check in, the mum was now in hospital suffering post-natal psychosis. Staff were able to chat with the mum on her mobile phone a couple of times and suggested that once she was home that they would do home visits. Mum was happy for the support.

After 2 months in hospital, mum returned home, staff contacted her, mum stated that she was grateful for the staff checking in on the family (both herself and her husband as he was at home caring for the 2 children). Through conversations with the dad and a friend who was supporting the family, they shared that the group was a way for the mum to feel connected. They had moved from country and family, therefore the mum held this group as part of her cultural healing. She identified the space as her “safe land” in a strange place and the group’s families had become “her family”.

This mum has continued to attend playgroup and the family is managing well with the support of this service and other professionals. This mum continues to engage with her psychologist and has now enrolled the 2.5 year old into day-care a couple of days a week for some much needed personal respite as recommended by the staff at the service.

Staff helped this mum within the group as her support network and this mum healed and grew more confident within the group. We empowered her and celebrated her strengths, this mum has gone from being in hospital with post-natal psychosis to facilitating weaving programs within the group.

Besides the cultural strength of the group, staff were able to identify that this mum needed to be supported through a cultural lens and not using the regular Resilience Practice Framework (RPF) early

intervention tool. Therefore using our cultural knowledge and understanding to support the family in a culturally safe way.

Staff ensured the cultural safety of this family by advocating for the style of support that was wrapped around the family. By using mainstream frameworks and systems the family may have disengaged from the service and therefore become a risk that could have potentially had her under the child safety radar.

4. An Aboriginal homeless pregnant woman with diagnosis of BPD, Bipolar, self-harm and suicidal ideation agreed to be referred to an Aboriginal community controlled intensive family support service, to their wellbeing team to protect mother and unborn. The mum was also linked to a local Indigenous health service for health and medication advice. She agreed for the referring service (a mainstream domestic violence and homelessness outreach service) to liaise with the Aboriginal community-controlled service and other Indigenous services as appropriate.

5. Using the Online Child Protection Guide (OCPG) indicated the need to make a report to child safety regarding a client. The practitioner spoke to the client about this and she stated she would prefer the service to make a report, instead of herself completing a self-report. When the report was made, the Referral Intake Service suggested the client be referred to an intensive family support service as she was independent and was acting protectively. This referral meant that child safety did not need to investigate further.

6. A family was referred by child safety to a local Aboriginal Family Wellbeing Service and then finally to a mainstream service for NDIS support. The mainstream service's allied health team and cultural practice advisor met with the family. The cultural practice advisor identified that the family could have some of their needs met for free through specialised Aboriginal services instead of using fee for service options. The connections were made for the family to appropriate Aboriginal services by the cultural practice advisor, allowing the family to direct the funds elsewhere.

7. A foster carer advocating for a child's reunification with their biological parent (due to having a good relationship with the parent) was referred by the mainstream foster care service to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Participation Program (FPP). First the mainstream service (lead by the cultural practice advisor) arranged for a meet and greet between the foster carer and the FPP, then they all worked together with the biological parent on a shared vision of reunification. Process is underway now.