

Family Matters 2020 – Community Services Directorate input

The ACT Government is committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and is implementing a series of initiatives to keep families strong and together.

The *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* sets out the commitment of the ACT Government and ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to work together to recognise and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the ACT. The Agreement includes a commitment to community leadership and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

On 17 December 2019, the final report of the *Our Booris, Our Way* review was released. A number of initiatives are being progressed against 28 recommendations, including the ongoing engagement of SNAICC to train Child and Youth Protection Services staff on the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), and funding Family Group Conferencing to divert families away from Childrens Court processes and to prioritise family led decision-making to keep children safe, strong and connected to family and culture. A designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice Leader, Senior Policy Officer, Training and Workforce Development Officer and Principal Practitioner have been appointed.

From November 2017 to July 2020, 41 families have been involved in a Family Group Conference, involving 89 children. 54 children have subsequently not entered care. For the remaining 35 children, decisions about the best care arrangements were made by the extended family.

The ACT Government also funds a partnership between Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation and OzChild to deliver Functional Family Therapy. This program works specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to keep children and young people at home safely, reducing or eliminating the need for involvement of the child protection system and creating positive family experiences. Since November 2018, 112 children and young people have been supported to stay with the 31 families involved in the program.

Of significance has been the decrease in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into out of home care. In 2016-17, 59 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were brought into care, this decreased to 52 children in 2017-18, and to 25 children in the 2018-19.

Policies focused on increased support for families to maintain children safely at home, embedding some of the ATSICPP into practice, and improving engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers have been developed through consultation with the Aboriginal Cultural Services Team, Ngura Naraganabang (Safety in the Pouch) Advisory

Group and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Co-Design Network - a core component of the *Early Support: Changing Systems, Changing Lives* initiative.

A Step Up for Our Kids (2015-2020) is the ACT Government's out-of-home care reform and has delivered a significant investment in early intervention and prevention services. The Post-Strategy Evaluation Plan includes a commitment to partner with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community so lived experiences of out-of-home care provide context for the data in the report.