



POLICY PAPER

Working in Effective Indigenous Partnerships

July 2010

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- Child & Family Welfare Association of South Australia
- Child & Family Welfare Association of Tasmania
- Child, Youth & Family Agencies of the ACT
- Centre for Excellence in Children & Family Welfare, Victoria
- Children's Youth & Family Agencies Association (WA)
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Foreword

The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia (CAFWAA) is the national peak body representing community service organisations working with vulnerable children, young people and families, including those experiencing neglect and abuse and those living in an out-of-home care environment.

Since incorporation in 1995, CAFWAA has taken a leadership role in advocating for improved public policy at a national level. In particular, CAFWAA has sought policy responses that strengthen the capacity of families and communities to care, nurture and protect children and young people and to ensure assistance is afforded to children and young people when adequate care is not provided.

The Commonwealth Government's national apology provided to the Stolen Generations (2008) and commitment to 'Closing the Gap' (2001) between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australia has provided a significant platform for our community to move forward together.

There is a continued crisis in child protection with too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families coming into contact with the statutory system. In 2010, 44 out of every 1000 Indigenous children were on care and protection orders, compared to 5 per 1000 non Indigenous children, (AIHW, 2010). This is a national shame.

Many non-government and government agencies are committed to working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to address these issues.

In 2009 SNAICC released their Service Development, Service Access and Cultural Respect Policy developed to provide a framework for service partnerships. It has provided to the sector a platform for a way forward. However, partnerships, how to do them well and what is wanted and needed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities continues to be a complex issue. Many times partnerships can appear paternalistic and whilst trying to provide additional support, undermine self determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and services.

This policy paper "Working in Effective Indigenous Partnerships" developed with SNAICC, and CAFWAA members attempts to harness the experience of the sector and honour for Aboriginal an Torres Strait Islander communities the essence of what makes effective partnerships and reinforces the key principles that are required to ensure that we are truly working together to end Indigenous disadvantage.

Lisa Hillan
Chair

The role of national, state, territory and local governments in child protection and family support is important and CAFWAA acknowledges and supports key initiatives by COAG such as the 'National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians', new reporting on national expenditure on services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the 'National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery'. However, alone departments cannot protect children or provide the best care for them. A partnership is required with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations that includes the full participation of the families and communities affected.

Partnership protocols and resources.

CAFWAA members endorse the SNAICC Service Development, Service Access and Cultural Respect Policy developed to provide a framework for service partnerships.

SNAICC proposes the development of a partnership resource to formalise and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' position in what is fast becoming established practice. Governments are increasingly seeking to do business with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and Aboriginal community-controlled sector through partnerships. At the moment partnerships are developed in an ad hoc and isolated way with no mechanism to promote good practice or to establish agreed protocols or principles. Similarly there is a lack of clarity or guidance for organisations seeking to establish new partnerships.

An agreed national partnership framework would allow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector to set the parameters for partnership, based on an acknowledgement of the prime importance of self-determination and a recognition that 'government funding bodies should work respectfully, openly and collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organizations and agencies to define, develop and deliver services and programs in a culturally respectful manner' Such partnerships would allow community-controlled organisations to be responsible for the areas of their expertise such as the design, development and delivery of programs and to build capacity in areas more fully developed in the mainstream sector such as administration and governance.

Inconsistent approaches to partnerships and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations produce inconsistent results for children and families and do not foster confidence in the sector or in communities.

SNAICC recommends the development and adoption of a mutually-agreed set of partnership principles, protocols and examples that reflect the emphasis of this Agreement and current national strategies, such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020, in framing issues of child protection and welfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All governments must commit to listening, participation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities leading to self-determination by all organisations. All developments should be undertaken using a strengths based approach rather than the deficits based approach that is often used currently.
- Commonwealth Government to ensure that the new National Education Curriculum Framework must continue to be strengthened with a fair and accurate history of the colonisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, supplemented by local information.
- Commonwealth Government to invest significantly in early childhood development, health education and ongoing education programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in literacy and numeracy and accessible, appropriate, articulated courses at TAFE, RTO, VET and tertiary levels.
- All governments to ensure that training in cultural competence and culturally sensitive family practice is funded and available in all training courses and on a recurrent basis, including specific training for workers selected from overseas recruitment.
- Commonwealth Government to invest significantly in early childhood development, health education and ongoing education programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in literacy and numeracy and accessible, appropriate, articulated courses at TAFE, RTO, VET and tertiary levels.
- All governments to ensure that training in cultural competence and culturally sensitive family practice is funded and available in all training courses and on a recurrent basis, including specific training for workers selected from overseas recruitment.

Building an effective and integrated child and family wellbeing system based on trust and honest dialogue between governments and communities.

Recent forums with community sector organisations, including many CAFWAA members, highlighted that relations with government at all levels are stressed, especially in planning and service delivery; responding to legal and regulatory constraints on organisations; and coping with constraints to funding and organisational sustainability in general.

The Productivity Commission's 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2009' identifies "a staggering lack of coordination in service delivery, inadequate policy development and program evaluation, and a surfeit of red tape – all of which have contributed to poor outcomes and a lack of capacity to take corrective action when things go wrong". The report identifies four factors that are common to 'many of the things that work', factors that should be incorporated in the planning, development and delivery of family services:

- Cooperative approaches between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and government, often involving non-profit and private sectors as well.
- Community involvement in program design and decision-making – a 'bottom-up' contribution, rather than just relying on 'top-down' direction. Avoidance of designing unilateral programs that result in unintended perverse consequences through lack of community input.
- Ongoing government support – human, financial and physical - less fragmentation in service delivery, pilot programs and short-term funding.
- Good governance – that is nurtured and supported, in both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and within government itself.

From the CAFWAA consultations the following specific areas are noted as contributing to better service delivery and improved outcomes for all families:

- Respect and cultural understanding, listening, recognition, shared celebrations and support.
- Robust dialogue, mutual trust, addressing differences openly, clear criteria, honest accountability, a belief that we can and do work together.
- Collaboration, interdependence, building on existing partnerships, sharing resources, joint service planning and working together to strengthen relationships; no competitive tendering.
- Needs based local planning, long term planning and slow, careful, consultative implementation.
- Full cost investment in core service delivery, outreach, partnering, workforce development, training, recruitment and retention and removal of undue regulation and compliance red tape.

- Thinking outside the square, encouraging innovation (but limiting short-term pilots).
- Develop data collection, building on research, undertaking transparent monitoring and review.
- Building improved, ethical and transparent relationships in working with local communities, government, corporate, business and philanthropic sectors.
- Partnerships should include be clear on information sharing, duty of care and risk management strategies and agreed arrangements for monitoring and review. Member consultations - AWA, NSW 2010, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2008, Families Australia, Canberra, 2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All government and community service organisations should work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities and families with humility and a commitment to listening. This should be supported by the development of an agreed national partnership framework spelling out principles, protocols and examples of good practice.
- Commonwealth government should coordinate planning for a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families Network within the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, 2009-2020, with all relevant agencies, such as Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Australian Crime Commission, COAG National Preventative Health Partnership; and Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy (Indigenous Communications area) and the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform.
- Tri-partite state-wide or regional Advisory Groups, with SNAICC and AICCA membership, should monitor the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Network and report back through the National Indigenous Reform Agenda.
- SNAICC should be fully resourced to assist the development, planning and resourcing of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families Network across Australia.
- Planning for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families Network should consider the work of organisations across Australia that have developed Reconciliation Action Plans.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement in the design, development and delivery of services in the child protection and wellbeing sector and commitment to re-building the capability and available resource base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families across generations to raise strong healthy, happy children.

Currently Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are thin on the ground in most states, particularly in the Northern Territory and in Western Australia and it is not possible to fully replicate the non-Indigenous service system. The response that is needed in child protection and family support services, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families need opportunities to build and maintain relationships and access to Aboriginal providers, will often best be provided by an AICCA or Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation, however this is currently not possible. Even funded outreach services from an Aboriginal service are not necessarily available. Significant sustained investment is required by government to ensure that there are AICCAs in all major regions and that there is a broad range of other community based Aboriginal services available to support child protection services. Some states have existing services which can inform the development of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous services, e.g. Lakidjeka Service run by VACCA in Victoria.

Other services for families such as community and child care centres could be run on a hub model enabling them to provide vital early intervention through outreach and family support services integrated with health and education services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Commonwealth Government should invest in a complete state and territory network of AICCAs with the ability to provide specialist services, with expert staff in child protection work and outreach services.
- Commonwealth Government should invest in and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to work in mutual collaboration with other non-Indigenous services.
- Commonwealth Government should invest in regional and local community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to provide a comprehensive range of broader family support and child welfare programs.
- Commonwealth Government should act in a participatory manner ensuring that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service system is self determined by local need with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance arrangements.
- Commonwealth Government should fund consultation on the integration of early years services such as, preschool and kindergarten to enable collaborative work with non-Indigenous and Indigenous services.

- All governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous services must work together to ensure that training and resources for cultural competence and culturally sensitive practice are provided and practice change occurs in all services, including specialist, outreach and adult focussed services

Collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and non-Indigenous services, working together to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and families, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services having a recognised leadership role.

It is essential that the greatest proportion of government funding and other resources should be directed to the highest areas of need and recognise the over representation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system. Targets to reduce the level of over representation should be set, monitored and regularly reported against.

SNAICC suggests that is not possible, nor desirable, to replicate the non Indigenous service system without risking a residualised, inferior system that works against real choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. There is evidence that some Aboriginal families already feel that they can only access Aboriginal specific services and that mainstream services are not for them.

CAFWAA members have a role to play in ensuring that non Indigenous services are accessible and welcoming and that they take responsibility to understand the needs of local communities and families, collaboratively plan what services they should deliver, what should be delivered in partnership and what they might need to be prepared to give up and transfer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The SNAICC timetable for moving appropriate services from non-Indigenous to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations proposes 3 years – this may not be realistic in all states. Transfer of service delivery will need to be carefully planned and phased according to local conditions. Many states and territories still have competitive tendering processes in place that are unhelpful to collaborative service provision. In the case of tenders that require or recommend partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations this work is rarely funded, nor is their provision for the range of ongoing work in building effective partnerships and in some cases in moving from auspice services, through services delivered in partnership to shifting programs fully to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. The Manitoba experience in Canada is an excellent example of where political will and a collaborative approach has shifted the mode of service delivery and brought much more self determination to First Nations People.

In NSW, SNAICC, ACWA and ABSEC are committed to endorsing the SNAICC partnership principles and following the Woods Commission they gained Departmental support to take

this work forward. This endorsement of a shared approach to Indigenous and non-Indigenous services working together in mutual support and building effective partnerships was announced at the NSW ACWA Conference.

ACWA member organisations undertook discussions and were given the opportunity to commit to reasonable outcomes, including a need for at least four years of capacity building, especially in out of home care. Some organisations are now engaged in short term auspice arrangements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services which will, when appropriate, cease as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services become accredited and take over responsibility for shared programs. ACWA members noted the need for fully funded service delivery, Board engagement, steering committees, new programs, recruitment and planning in order to implement change in a thorough and timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All non-Indigenous services to strive to be accessible, culturally inclusive and welcoming with a measurable and accountable level of cultural competence and openness to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities.
- All non Indigenous services to be honest and undertake a full independent assessment on their organisation's progress towards the SNAICC principles, assessing where they are failing and what improvements they can make.
- Governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous services to work together collaboratively to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the child protection system and to provide family support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- Governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous services to make firm plans for the transfer of appropriate services from non-Indigenous to Indigenous services backed by appropriate consultation, resources and mutual agreements.
- All governments to undertake consultative work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non Indigenous services to identify and rectify the processes and lack of resources that mitigate against successful partnerships.
- All governments to consider local services first for local service provision and to provide assistance with capacity building and; ensure a very high level of due diligence in contracting services with for-profit and multi-national providers to ensure the best use of scarce resources, and the continuance of service system stability and local knowledge.
- Commonwealth Government to invest in a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Development Strategy for the community services sector (family support and child welfare). (CAFWAA Workforce Development, 2010.)

CONCLUSION

CAFWAA is committed to the development of a national partnership framework between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, government and non-Indigenous service and the implementation of SNAICC principles for partnership and supports the development by SNAICC of a partnership resource for community services.

Hard decisions will need to be made about the transfer of funding and services from non Indigenous to Aboriginal services in a reasonable and effective manner, accompanied by new investment in the sector. CAFWAA members remain committed to the belief that working together respectfully, committed to the principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait self-determination, we can make a bigger difference to outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and contribute to 'closing the gap' in the areas of family support and child welfare.

RESOURCES

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Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. Productivity Commission, Melbourne, 2009.

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- SNAICC, Victoria, Establishing a Strong Out-Of-Home-Care System for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, 2005.
- SNAIC, Victoria, Submission to Special Commission of Inquiry into NSW Child Protection Inquiry (Comment on Manitoba Model) 2007.
- SNAICC, Victoria, news, resources-happenings, Clearinghouse, Literature Review, Service Directory www.snaicc.asn.au

VACCA Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. www.vacca.org/resources-information/information-about-vacca

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