



Principles and Practice Recommendations: Child protection/removal

Based on the findings of our community engagement process with the Aboriginal community of Perth, three early childhood development priority areas have been identified (Early childhood education, Child protection/removal, Housing). The Elder/Co-researcher group of the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort (Our Children, Our Heart) Project advocate the following principles and practice recommendations in relation to the Child protection/removal priority area.

Principles

- Recognise the impact that increasing rates of child removal and inappropriate placements are having on family functioning, sibling relationships, and children's connection to culture and family.
- Recognise the need for a child protection system that is attuned and responsive to the specific needs of Aboriginal children and their families.
- Recognise that the fear of child removal is intergenerational because of both historical and contemporary practices and is negatively impacting on many parents' decisions and behaviour with their children, including not accessing health services and other support in case they are judged or reported.
- Recognise the important role of the extended family network for Aboriginal children's development, learning and access to and experience of cultural knowledge and kinship.
- Recognise that Aboriginal families provide children with a large network of people who care about them and that this gives kids a sense of belonging and security.
- Commitment from relevant organisations and agencies to adhere to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle that asserts the importance of family, cultural and community connections to the identity and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who come into contact with the statutory child protection system.
- Commitment from organisations and agencies to a holistic and preventative approach to child protection endorsed by the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

Practice Recommendations

- Ensure that the Aboriginal community/Elders are given a real and powerful voice in the child protection system and its decision making regarding Aboriginal children.
- Provide systems that support rather than punish parents and work with families (including extended family) to prevent removal of children or have them placed with an Aboriginal family.
- Ensure that, wherever possible, Aboriginal children remain with family, are reunified where they have been removed, and stay connected to their Aboriginal culture and community.
- Provision of effective community controlled strategies to prevent and respond to family violence.
- Provide earlier intervention and targeted support for Aboriginal families in crisis to prevent child removal.
- Ensure ongoing cross-cultural skill development for all non-Indigenous staff, particularly front-line staff.
- Provide culturally appropriate early intervention drug and alcohol programs for affected parents and other caregivers as well as providing support to other family members.
- Provide targeted support (programs and services) for grandparents who are primary care givers to Aboriginal children.

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Community reflections

Child protection/removal

"If a child is taken away and given to a white family, they have got nothing. They might have a home and they might have clothes and they might have schooling, but that Nyoongar culture is lost. That part of them, they don't get back, and even when they come back at the age of 18 they have lost it." [Participant, Langford Aboriginal Association Focus Group, 2017]

"you want them to stay in your culture and learn about your culture as well, you know, because you don't want them being placed somewhere else because they are going to miss out on their culture. They are going to miss out knowing their family, their aunties, their uncles, their other nannas, their other pops, so that's why we step up as a grandparent and we do take them on because we want to keep them in our environment. But it is hard sometimes." [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

"My six are the only six out of thirty-three grandchildren that are not in DCP". [Participant, Armadale Community Forum, 2016]

