

19 December 2017



Public Submissions  
Family is Culture: Independent Review  
Locked Bag 9001  
Alexandria NSW 1435

Via email: [submissions@familyisculture.nsw.gov.au](mailto:submissions@familyisculture.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Family is Culture: Independent Review**

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Family is Culture: Independent Review of Aboriginal Children and Young People in out of home care (OOHC) in NSW.

The NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) works with and for people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to see positive change in our communities. As the peak body for health and community services in NSW, we support the sector to deliver innovative services that grow and develop as needs and circumstances evolve.

NCOSS believes that all children deserve the very best start in life. But the life outcomes of too many of our children and young people are being limited by circumstances beyond their control. We also know that for children and young people who come into contact with the child protection system, the outlook is even worse.<sup>1</sup> In NSW, there has been a steady increase in both the number and rate of children entering OOHC, and we now have the second highest rate of children in OOHC of all the States and Territories.<sup>2</sup>

Of particular concern is the wellbeing of Aboriginal families, who experience disadvantage on multiple fronts. Alarming, Aboriginal children in NSW are still over 10 times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers to be in OOHC.<sup>3</sup>

This is an ongoing issue clearly showing that we as a State are not doing enough to achieve genuine Aboriginal self-determination in child welfare, or invest in Aboriginal-designed and delivered solutions to strengthen families and keep children safe at home. Moreover, approaches in OOHC and the broader child protection system are poorly aligned to the needs of Aboriginal children and families.

As such, in response to questions raised in the Family is Culture review, NCOSS endorses the key views and recommendations raised in the submission from our member organisation, the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) (AbSec).

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<sup>1</sup> Osborn, A, & Bromfield, L. M. (2007) *Young people leaving care* (Research Brief No. 7). Melbourne: National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>2</sup> AIHW (2016) *Child protection Australia 2014-15*, Cat. no. CWS 57

<sup>3</sup> Productivity Commission (2016) *Report on Government Services*, Child Protection Services.

In particular, NCOSS reinforces that:

- There needs to be a fundamental shift in the current approach to child protection that focuses on crisis and statutory intervention. We need to address the fundamental issue of the well of poverty, disadvantage and intergenerational trauma that disproportionately impacts on the safety, welfare and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people, their families and communities. Aboriginal families need to be supported early on in the community if we are to reduce their contact with the child protection system.
- The NSW Government should be looking to follow other jurisdictions by enshrining elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles in the child protection system, particularly prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection.
- Aboriginal families and communities must be involved in decision-making about the care and protection of their children. Aboriginal community-controlled agencies are best placed to support Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC, including maintaining their connection to family, community, culture and Country that is central to identity development and wellbeing.
- Greater investment in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is required to meet this need, particularly in providing appropriate supports to kinship carers and families providing the day-to-day nurturing care of Aboriginal children and young people.

NCOSS further emphasises that improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC can only be achieved through an approach that recognises the importance of self-determination, and holistic and Aboriginal community-controlled service provision.

To this end, NCOSS also encourages the Family is Culture review to be guided at all times by the principles of the Family Matters campaign,<sup>4</sup> 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. These are:

- Applying a child-focussed approach
- Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
- Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture
- Pursuing evidence-based responses
- Supporting, healing and strengthening families
- Challenging systemic racism and inequities.

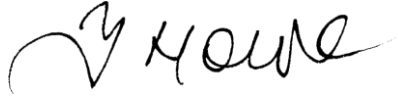
We look forward to the findings from this consultation, and a collaborative, robust and above all Aboriginal-led approach towards improving outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people in NSW.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.familymatters.org.au/>

If you would like to discuss any of the issues we raise in this submission in more detail, or require any further information or input, please do not hesitate to contact Elyse Cain, NCOSS Policy Lead, on 02 8960 7912 or [elyse@ncoss.org.au](mailto:elyse@ncoss.org.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy McLeod Howe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tracy McLeod Howe  
Chief Executive Officer  
NSW Council of Social Service

