



## **KARI Aboriginal Resources Presentation**

**2010 SNAICC National Conference 'For Our Children, Local strengths, national Challenges'**

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010 session 19 – Out of Home Care; Culturally appropriate**

### **Aboriginal Case Management in Out Of Home Care (OOHC)**

Presented by Chris Laurie and Casey Walpole

KARI Aboriginal Resources opened in 1999, it started like most new agencies on a wish and a prayer, in a small community facility, hoping that funding will be secured and that the service will grow. With a lot of hard work it did and today KARI is the biggest Aboriginal OOHC children's service in NSW, we are located in the Liverpool CBD which lies in South West Sydney and provide services across South West Sydney and the surrounding areas. KARI now takes up an entire floor of a large commercial building and has 48 people working with the agency which includes 30 fulltime staff, 3 part time staff, 7 casuals, 2 consultants and shared assistance from 6 professionals through partnerships with other agencies. 73% of full time staff are Aboriginal.

In 2010 KARI achieved 5 years full accreditation with all requirements met for evidence by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, to provide a general foster care program to Aboriginal Children and Young People, who are placed by the NSW Children's Court under the parental responsibility of the NSW Minister for Community Services.

KARI receives funding from NSW Community Services to provide support to 120 Aboriginal children and young people in care, we also receive funding for other programs that support our Aboriginal Community through our Community Programs division including vacation care, school scholarships and various programs that assist young Aboriginal people to reach their potential. We have a commitment to Community unity which supports Aboriginal Community Development and we host one of the largest Aboriginal social events in Sydney each October with our Gala Dinner.

The KARI Aboriginal Multidisciplinary Assessment Centre (KAMAC) provides children and young people in OOHC with a full assessment at the point that they enter placement with KARI, this assessment involves the participation of a Paediatrician, Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech Pathologist and the KARI Caseworker, participation of the Carer and/or birth parents is essential to get the full understanding of the child's needs. The outcome is a strong assessment of the child or young person's physical and emotional needs and the capacity to look at all aspects of the child's life as a whole. This program has received several awards and the model is recommended in both the NSW Wood Report on Child Protection and the Working document, Development of National Standards for Out of Home care.

KARI is committed to providing quality, sustainable services to the Indigenous Community of South West Sydney especially in the areas of Aboriginal child protection and Indigenous Community support programs.

## **CASE MANAGEMENT AT KARI – WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT?**

Many of you will know OOHC services in your local area, and like everyone else we provide a caseworker that supports the foster carers and the child, we have training and assessment of new carers and we provide ongoing training to carers, but what makes us different?

Our agency is Aboriginal in every aspect and we embed every action with a cultural conscience, now this doesn't mean that we just employ Aboriginal workers, it is more than that, culture is at the forefront of practice for every one of us, even those staff members that are not Aboriginal, we spend our time thinking about what a child or family need to grow up as strong members of the Aboriginal Community of South West Sydney and then put programs in place to support it.

Our aim today is to show you the key elements of our cultural program and how your agency can work with children and young people to make the same cultural commitment. We hope that you can take some ideas away that will assist you to achieve this.

Today we will be looking at four components of our cultural program;

- Cultural Care Plans
- The Cultural Liaison Officer
- The Support Team and
- School Holiday programs

### **CULTURAL CARE PLANS**

Every child and young person who is in a KARI placement must have a Cultural Care Plan which stands alone from the overall care plan developed in partnership with Community Services. Our Cultural Care Plans are holistic and look at all aspects of the child or young person's life, they require participation from all key stakeholders including the child or young person and their kinship connections, the carer, the Caseworker and at times the Cultural Liaison Officer.

One of the main aims of the Cultural Care Plan is to track a child or young person's knowledge of what being Aboriginal means to them, this gives us a foundation to build on when developing programs and activities. Every year the child or young person is asked to identify a cultural area of interest and the Caseworker then takes responsibility to ensure that the child or young person has access to the information required to help build their cultural platform.

Within the Cultural Care Plan we identify who is who within the child or young person's family and it includes a comprehensive genogram, this portion of the Cultural Care Plan is largely driven by birth family participation. Birth parents are encouraged to vocalise what they would like the child or young person to participate in or what else can be done in regard to culture, they are also asked how they can assist in maintaining cultural identity. Birth parents usually willingly participate when they are asked to contribute to this component of the child's life.

The carers are assessed in regards to their cultural competency and capacity to support the child or young person's cultural development. Every carer is required to identify what they propose to do over the coming year to maintain cultural identity and they are also required to undertake a cultural project or initiative. The carers are provided with a list of initiatives that they can select from with the expectation that they will carry out at least one of those per year, the initiatives are all family focused events and include the whole family, where a carer has more than one child or young person from the same family they can use the one activity across all of the siblings Cultural Care Plans, most

carers actively seek to complete more of the initiatives and find them to be a fun thing to do with the family.

The initiatives offered to the Carers in 2010 were:

Project and Initiatives	Description <i>(please ask your caseworker for assistance with resources)</i>
Art project	Produce a piece of artwork that is done in partnership with yourself as the carer, the child or young person you have in care and other members of the family. The art work should symbolise the importance of family, kin connections and/or identity <i>(you will be provided with the materials needed to facilitate this art project including a catalogue of traditional symbols and techniques)</i>
Take the child or young person to visit their Community and/or research their Community and family connections.	Make a scrapbook of information about the child or young person's Community to assist them in learning about their cultural connections. Include pictures of what the Community looks like, how big it is, where it is located, what Aboriginal services exist in the area etc. Once this is done you could take the child or young person to visit their Community and some of the sites you have identified throughout the scrapbook. <i>(If you take the child or young person to visit their Community and it is more than 50km away you will be reimbursed for mileage at the identified rate.)</i>
Cultural Excursion	Organise an excursion for all of the family to a culturally relevant venue such as Muru Mittigar, Blue Mountains or a Museum with Aboriginal displays and/or artworks.
Research Project	Pick an area of interest in regard to Aboriginal culture and endeavour to find out as much as possible about it, whether it be dreamtime stories, song and dance, totems etc: and compile your information into a guide not only for yourself to reflect upon and learn from but also the children in your care and other family members.
Role Models Project	Ask the child to identify an Aboriginal celebrity that they look up to and commence making a scrapbook about them detailing information about where they were born, what their culture means to them, why they are successful etc. It is important that children have someone other than their carers to look up to, somebody that is Aboriginal and acknowledged publicly for their success.
Cultural Awareness Training	Participate in cross cultural awareness training. This training will be offered by KARI on at least four occasions each calendar year.

### **CULTURAL LIAISON OFFICER**

This position was created in response to the growing need to support children and carers culturally, the OOHC Management team identified that Community Services in South West Sydney were struggling in their efforts to carry out Aboriginal Placement Principles effectively and were utilising Aboriginal workers that had no connection to the case to identify actions, whilst this gave a culturally context it was not specific to that particular child or young person but very generic. Children and babies were coming into care and no work was being done on identifying alternate kinship options until the child had been in placement for a significant amount of time, in the case of newborn babies the search for alternate family members and assessment of them as carers was left until the child was born and in placement. The aim of us having a Cultural Liaison Officer who could research these options was to identify kinship connections early and to reduce the amount of time a child would spend in OOHC and away from the family.

The position was created in late 2009 and has been focused on researching and developing genograms for each child or young person placed with KARI. The Cultural Liaison Officer also meets

every new birth family when the child first comes into placement, explains their role within the agency and commences research into the kinship connections to forward to Community Services as options for care.

We have been highly successful in identifying alternate kinship options for children and young people since the inception of the program and this is evidenced by the 39 children and young people that have been restored to family in that time. This success is attributed to parents being more engaged with our service and having the good rapport with the worker, as well as the capacity of the worker to dig deeper into the options and identify kin that the family had not thought about.

We have expanded this from a part time to a full time position due to the growing need and the demonstrated success of the program, in the future we hope to explore a partnership with Community Services in Metro South West that will facilitate family group conferencing so that children and young people are placed with family at the earliest possible stage.

### **KARI SUPPORT TEAM**

In 2009 the OOHC Management Team recognised a number of areas where we could use a casual support person and when we looked at options for where to get support we discovered it was very expensive and none of the agencies could provide an Aboriginal worker.

Some of the areas where we could see a need for this type of worker were:

Caseworkers were struggling to find time to carry out all of the tasks associated with managing a case load of 12 children, particular when they had a number of those that were on interim orders through the court. Interim orders usually means that a child or young person will have birth family contact at least weekly and in some cases such as newborn babies it may be daily. In one case the Caseworker was going to have to commit 20 of their 35 hours per week to one family, this would mean that other families would be disadvantaged and that the Caseworker was at risk of burnout.

Many of our children and young people were faced with exclusions from schools and pre-schools, these children like most of the children in OOHC have behavioural issues that impact on their daily lives because of the trauma they have experienced. We know that the NSW Department of Education has funding to support children who are in OOHC but this generally means support of a minimal amount of time which is not allocated to the child, rather it is allocated to a class where a child exists with special needs. The funding allocated through Education is not enough to make a sustainable difference to the children that we work with, so rather than just accept what was being offered, we looked at how we could fix this problem.

Children and young people had therapeutic needs, we had counsellors, psychologists and a speech therapist but in some cases the foster carer worked and could not get the child to the appointment at the time allocated, or they had other children or young people with additional needs and were attending to other appointments, all the child or young person needed was transport and this was seen as an opportunity to have the child spend time after school with a mentor who could also bring them to the appointment and take them home.

As part of our funding we receive contingency funds to provide additional supports to children and young people in care. This funding is allocated per child and is available to spend on any items that are not covered by the care allowance, those things that are considered to be above and beyond the responsibility of the carer such as engaging an Aboriginal worker who would support the child in a variety of ways, and that was the birth of our KARI Support Team.

Today the KARI Support Team is a team of casual workers that provide support to Aboriginal children and young people in a variety of environments. All of the staff in this team are Aboriginal, they each bring a commitment to children and young people and each of them bring specific skills relating to working in this field, for example a worker may have a particular skill in relation to sport or music. To ensure that we provide high quality support we have entered a partnership with NSW TAFE who are providing our staff with training that will give them a Statement of Attainment in Aboriginal Teacher Aide Support, we also provide in house training that deals specifically with the particular needs of our children and young people with whom they work. Overall the team is provided with four hours training and development per fortnight as a group which also allows for peer support and group supervision. Debriefing in relation to the individual cases is provided by the team or agency that engages the individual worker for a particular child or young person.

There are four main activities that the Support Workers carry out, they are:

- Family contact
- Educational Support
- Mentoring
- Program Support

### ***FAMILY CONTACT***

Maintaining connections with birth family is a key element of our OOHC program, the children and young people in care have a contact schedule which may be with siblings, birth parents or other extended family. In most cases this contact is supervised. KARI is committed to making sure that this contact is conducted in a culturally appropriate way that supports not only the child but also the family member. Many birth parents complain about experiences that they have had elsewhere where they have contact in a sterile room that is in a secure environment with someone sitting in the corner watching every move they make, whilst we accept that during the assessment of a families capacity to care for a child some of this may be necessary we believe that there are ways to do this that make it a great experience for everyone.

At KARI we conduct a risk assessment when families first commence contact and then a contact visit can be like a family outing, the support workers provide the key support to this event, the child would be collected from the home by an Aboriginal Support Worker that they know well and would call Aunty or Uncle, it would be the same person every time and if for some reason that person cannot do the visit it would be the Caseworker, also referred to as Aunty or Uncle, that they know well. During the trip, the worker would be talking to the child about what is going to happen today, about how they feel about the day planned and any anxieties that they may have, the birth family will know the worker and have developed a relationship with them, this worker is not a decision maker, this is a key element of the success of these visits, the parent understands this so time is not spent with the birth family trying to negotiate access or other outcomes and it leaves them to enjoy the visit. The environment is culturally inviting with Aboriginal content in the room or if they choose they can go out into the Community. On the return trip the worker can debrief with the child or young person and support them with any issues they may have and because they also know the carers well they can provide thorough feedback to the care about the visit. The support worker will then provide a written report on the visit to the Caseworker.

In this environment a Support Worker plays the role of Mentor, they assist the family to have meaningful contact that is as close to normal family life as possible, they encourage the parent to plan the visit and when appropriate will incorporate celebrations like mothers and fathers day or birthdays, they may work on some life story work during the visit or have an activity that is part of the cultural care plan where the birth family can be involved in the cultural education of their child,

importantly the worker is not sitting on the outside watching, they are interacting with the family as part of the visit and once the relationship is established they play the Aunty or Uncle role as any extended family would on a family outing.

### ***EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT***

The educational support of children in our program has been a great success, as yet we have been able to offer this to minimal numbers due to funding but as we extend our fee for service we will be able to extend our program. We are currently working with three children in school and preschool settings.

This is a case study of one of those children, please note that some facts in this case study have been changed to protect the child's identity, none of the changes alter the outcomes:

#### **Bryce and Uncle Scott.**

A male Support Worker, Uncle Scott, attends a Year 2 class in the local Primary School two days a week for four hours each day to support Bryce, who has been challenging the educational system since kindergarten. Bryce attends the behavioural unit at the school 3 days a week and is integrated into mainstream school two days a week, his time in the behavioural unit is coming to an end as the funding only allows for limited placement in this transitional program, the school was not looking positively at his entry into the mainstream class as his behaviours were a high risk to other students, his educational prospects were extremely poor. Uncle Scott had been working with Bryce as a mentor and had an established relationship with him.

When Uncle Scott goes to the school he works in the classroom as any other Teacher's Aid would work, but his focus is completely on Bryce, he understands the triggers for Bryce's behaviours and watches for them, supporting Bryce to work through his emotions and to remain in the classroom.

In the 4th term of 2009, prior to Uncle Scott's commencement at the school, Bryce was suspended for twenty eight days, which was a 50% of the term, since Uncle Scott has been at the school Bryce has had no suspensions at all. At the end of term two this year Bryce attended the office and showed the staff very proudly his school photo and there in the back row in the place of the teacher's aide was Uncle Scott, this clearly demonstrated the schools willingness to embrace the program and to make this child's support part of the classroom.

### ***MENTORING***

The mentoring arm exists as an informal program and a more formal program is in development, we intend to grow this program over the remainder of 2010 to a point where we can provide the service to external bodies as a fee for service.

Currently we have workers allocated to children and young people where they provide other services as outlined above and whilst attending to those services they provide this mentor role to the child. Mentoring is defined as the guidance of a wise teacher, this is the role our workers take, some of the foster carers are single female parents and we have a few same sex couples, the boys in these placements have not had access to positive male role models and this is the void that some of our male mentors fill. Whilst there are times when the mentoring is done as part of another task as described in family contact above, sometimes it is purely for the purpose of mentoring. Most good mentoring programs are done whilst doing another activity and our team have skills that allow for this to happen, Uncle Scott is a highly respected member of the junior rugby league Community and as such is well placed to provide young boys with a way to expel energy and to work with boys that

have anger issues, he can work with them using physical activities as a tool for developing strategies to deal with issues that come up in their lives.

### ***PROGRAM SUPPORT***

Another role that the Support Team fulfils is to assist with group programs to ensure that there is an Aboriginal person attending all activities. These range from assisting with vacation care programs for both children and young people in OOHC and also young people in the Community to supporting children in OOHC who attend the school holiday programs and require additional support to be successful.

Overall the Support Worker has become an integral part of our agencies resources, they are available to any part of the service and are purchased from the agency in the same way that an external agency would purchase the service, eventually we hope that the fee for service component of this program will provide us with a small income that will support additional children and young people in the educational support program and other programs in the agency.

Ultimately it is about self determination and not accepting that the service does not exist but taking the plunge and providing the service ourselves.

### **HOLIDAY PROGRAMS**

School holidays give us an opportunity to spend extra time with the children and young people that are placed with KARI, this time allows for some more intensive programs and lots of fun.

#### **IndigART**

Every April School holidays the OOHC Program facilitates the IndigART Program. The Artist in Residence program enables KARI OOHC children and young people to participate in an art project that will enhance and build upon their cultural identity and enable them to connect with their Community.

A local Aboriginal artist is engaged to facilitate the program and has the responsibility of teaching the children about traditional painting techniques, symbols and their meanings and how to tell story through art.

Upon the completion of the artwork, all pieces are entered in the Mil-Pra Art Exhibition, an exhibition that showcases local Indigenous talents.

#### **Elders Story Telling Project**

In the July School Holiday period we facilitate an Elders Story telling Project whereby a child is partnered with an elder from the Community and a life story exchanged. At the completion of the project each pair will create their own story, dreamtime or real, which is published and placed in our library for all to share.

With this program we attempt to connect children to their culture through engagement with elders and their stories.

#### **Cooking Classes**

Too often the children, young people and carers involved with the KARI OOHC program only experience tasting traditional Indigenous foods such as kangaroo and emu at special events such as NAIDOC. This program teaches those participating how to introduce traditional Indigenous

ingredients into everyday cooking. Recipes taught include traditional damper, kangaroo stew and lemon myrtle and poppy seed pancakes.

### **Cultural Camp**

Each year the OOHC team facilitate a cultural camp for the children and young people in the KARI out of home care program.

Children attending the camp are exposed to cultural activities and practices such as the tasting and preparing of bush tucker, visiting various cultural sites, learning about cultural artefacts and participating in activities such as traditional song and dance and boomerang throwing.

### **Cultural Dance Classes**

The aim of this program is to give children and young people exposure to traditional and contemporary forms of Aboriginal dance. The program is facilitated by a trained professional. Over the course of the program three dances are learnt culminating in a performance attended by various stakeholders. The future aim of this project is to implement an ongoing dance group so that those who are wanting to learn more about and express themselves through culture. It is the hope of the KARI management team that this group, once confident, can perform at various events and functions with the intention of sharing their cultural learning's to the Community.

We hope you enjoyed our journey and are able to take away from this presentation some great ideas to use when you get home that will enable Aboriginal children and young people to explore their culture.

### **For further information**

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