

THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

PAGE 24

Inside this issue:

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN 2017-2019

/ PAGE 6

AASW's commitment to reconciliation

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2018 / PAGE 15

'Promoting Community and
Environmental Sustainability'

PRACTISING INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK

/ PAGE 25

Life experience informing practice

RECLAIMING OUR SAFE WAYS OF PARENTING

/ PAGE 36

How trauma research is supporting
Aboriginal ways of child rearing

MORE THAN A 'TAPESTRY OF FRAGMENTS'

/ PAGE 38

Establishing a family violence service



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CONTENTS

NEWS

President's report: Working for change	3
CEO's report: AASW reaches 11,000 members	4
Strengthening our position to advocate	4
Linda Ford: AASW National Board director - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative	5
Reconciliation Action Plan 2017-2019	6
AASW Australia Day Statement: 'Australia Day should be inclusive of all Australians'	8
Close the Gap Day	8
10th anniversary of the National Apology	9
Acknowledgement of Country for journal	10
Fulbright scholar studies Indigenous body dysphoria	10
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags	11
A helpful guide: Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders	12
Captain Starlight: Providing children with a positive health experience	13
Aboriginal children need loving, safe and culturally appropriate homes	14
World Social Work Day 2018: 'Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability'	16
Talented social workers showcase initiatives at student conference	23

THE FIRST AUSTRALIANS: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

Practising Indigenous social work	25
Knowledge rights: How do First Australians fare?	26
Why I became a social worker: Lived experience of the stolen generation	28
Support for self-determination imperative to address the over-representation of children in the child protection system	30
The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak goes global!	31
Aboriginal social work graduates: Where to now?	34
Reclaiming our safe ways of parenting	36
More than a 'tapestry of fragments'	38

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SPRING EDITION

Contributions for the Spring 2018 issue will be accepted until 3 August. The theme for articles will be **Social work practice with refugees and asylum seekers**.

AASW members whose articles are published in *Social Work Focus* can claim time spent to research and prepare them towards CPD requirements, specifically Category 3. We accept up to 10 articles in line with each issue's social work theme.

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Angela Yin
Communications Lead

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Copyeditor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The AASW respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians, and pays its respects to Elders past and present.

Join us on social media:



WORKING FOR CHANGE

Social workers pride ourselves as being members of a profession based on our values of respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity. We work from a human rights perspective and our profession acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the preamble of our Code of Ethics. We are committed to acknowledging and understanding the historical and contemporary disadvantages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the implications this has for culturally competent, safe and sensitive social work practice.

As an Association, it is true that we have ticked many boxes in this space in recent years. We have acknowledged our role in the stolen generations and issued a formal apology; we have a platform in our new Strategic Plan to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work and a Board committed to actioning this; we have a Reconciliation Action Plan and a very active and influential RAP steering committee; we are working to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and ways of knowing throughout the Association with training for staff, training for members, and compulsory courses in social work programs in universities across Australia; we have spoken out in the media, through government submissions and other public forums. All steps in the right direction, but not nearly enough.

As social workers, we are only too aware of our nation's appalling report card and human rights abuses against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In recent months we have seen a rejection of the Uluru statement; still no Treaty; the 10th Closing the Gap Report in a row that shows that the gap is not closing (and interestingly, does not mention the impact on this gap of neoliberalist policies such as the Intervention or the cashless debit card); an appalling distortion in child protection spending that sees 17% of child protection funding spent on family support services, compared with 83% spent on child protection services – a distortion that plays out with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being 10 times more likely to end up in out-of-home care than

non-Indigenous children, the majority for reasons of neglect (neglect judged so by a system steeped in racial and systemic discrimination); and only 66% of these placements nationally conform to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. We haven't dealt with the effects of the last stolen generation, while we are creating the next. Wasn't it Einstein who said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results?

Of course, there are many social workers doing things differently, however despite embracing critical and anti-oppressive social work theories and practices, most social workers in Australia still practice through a very white, individually focused paradigm. We are in danger of falling under Einstein's definition of insane practice, doing the same thing over and over. We can't afford to be that social worker, or that social work Association. Our challenge as a profession is to understand and engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and healing in our practice and in doing so, understand and learn from the strengths of collective community approaches that exist in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

For decades now, Indigenous agencies, communities and social workers have been arguing for changes that highlight ways forward that promote cultural connections, preserve traditional culture and identity, and improve resilience and well-being. Decolonising practice begins with promoting and resourcing the role of Indigenous owned and place-based



CHRISTINE CRAIK

AASW National President

processes and services, working towards genuine control, decision making and self-determination. Imagine an Indigenous child welfare system that works first and foremost in family support and prevention, and then does more than try to meet a benchmark of child placement principles? Imagine a system that builds on the strengths of families and community and one that values collective parenting (including key roles of elderly family members) honouring the place of spirituality in family business. Imagine mainstream social work and mainstream agencies taking their place on the boundaries of this system.

As a profession and as an Association, we are working for change in this space. As you read through these articles in this FOCUS, reflect upon your understandings and your practice. We have done some of the work that needs to be done, but have a long way to go.

•

'If you are here to help me, you are part of the problem. If you are here because you understand that your emancipation is inextricably tied up with mine, then we can get on with it'

Lilla Watson

AASW REACHES 11,000 MEMBERS

STRENGTHENING OUR POSITION TO ADVOCATE



CINDY SMITH
Chief Executive Officer

Together. Stronger. Influential: the AASW is in a positive position as we remind members it is now time to renew your membership.

The Board approved the pillars and high level objectives for the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan. Staff are now finalising the activities, alongside the 2018–2019 budget, that will ensure the AASW can deliver the Plan's objectives. The Strategic Plan will be available on the website as of May 2018.

We are very proud to announce that we have just reached 11,000 members. This is a huge acknowledgement that the AASW is on the right path and that social workers endorse the Association.

To remain relevant as the voice of the profession the membership of the Association will need to keep pace with the number of available social workers eligible to join. Although 11,000 members is an accomplishment, as a professional association we should be aiming for 70% of the potential market; that is, 70% of the social workers who are eligible to join the Association. However, 11,000 members is closer to 30% of the potential market, so we have a way to go. Over the course of this year you will see a renewed focus on membership recruitment activities and providing good quality continuing professional development.

To meet the objectives in the Strategic Plan 2018–2021, the Board and the CEO need to better understand social workers' professional needs and expectations as well as determining how well AASW satisfies such needs.

The AASW engaged Di Marzio Research to seek feedback from members and lapsed members via an online survey. Lines of enquiry included communications, continuing professional development (CPD), advocacy and social policy, member services as well as member satisfaction. The survey took place during March 2018, with 1,541 responses received (15% response rate), which is considered a very good return. When the information is collated, we will publish the results in an overview in the

National e-Bulletin and more in-depth in the next Annual Report.

To also assist in the achievement of the Strategic Plan we will be establishing several National Advisory Panels (NAPs) in areas such as the NDIS, Mental Health Reform, Registration, and Regional and Remote Social Work. The NAPs' function is to advise the staff to ensure our information is current and relevant when we are acting on behalf of the community and profession in the various government and peak body forums.

With 11,000 members, we have a broad network of social workers who have specific experiences and expertise on which we hope to draw. This is a valuable opportunity to advocate on behalf of the community and profession and come forward to assist if you are free to do so and have the particular expertise and experiences to advise on the topic area.

This issue of *Social Work Focus* centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work and the AASW has recently focused on two key areas impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children – adoption and out-of-home care.

In an opinion piece published online by the ABC (and reproduced in this edition), Christine Craik, AASW National President, and Linda Ford, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative director, identified that recent arguments about the removal of Indigenous children from their families fail to appreciate the complexity of the issue.

Reducing the debate to oversimplified understandings of the factors that contribute to the devastating disparity in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children will only further entrench this inequality. They highlighted the systemic biases, barriers and lack of support provided that impact on Aboriginal fostering and adoption capacity.

In our submission to the Close the Gap Refresh, the AASW focused on the need for the Close the Gap targets to address the over-representation

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Indigenous children are 9.8 times more likely to be removed from their family than non-Indigenous children.¹ This is a national crisis and the Close the Gap efforts need to address these shocking statistics.

The AASW believes there is a need for a long-term commitment and approach to addressing the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across Australia. Indigenous communities need a major commitment of funding to redress the current gaps in services, especially early intervention family supports that build community capacity. There is no single solution to addressing this issue, but any action must begin by working with Indigenous communities in partnership and collaboration.

Given the enormity of the issue, we joined with Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in calling for an additional target for the elimination of over-representation in out-of-home care. We know that progress against such a target will only occur with action to address the factors that lead to intervention from child protection authorities.

We also endorsed SNAICC's proposal that this new target be underpinned by a national strategy and that targeted improved wellbeing for children and addresses the key drivers of child protection intervention across issues including intergenerational trauma, poverty, family violence, mental health and substance misuse. Such a national strategy must also drive culturally safe prevention and early intervention responses that support families to stay safely together.

¹ <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-protection-and-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child-care>

LINDA FORD

AASW NATIONAL BOARD DIRECTOR – ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER REPRESENTATIVE

AASW director, Linda Ford, is on the Board and chairs the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group. Since taking over as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative from Josephine Lee, she is the only Indigenous person on the board. However, she also points out that she is also the only Queenslander.

As she told Mount Isa's Northwest Star newspaper, at the time of her appointment last year, "It's important to have someone on the National Board who is Indigenous and from a rural and remote area that can highlight the challenges for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers and their clients."

Linda is an Aboriginal woman whose family is originally from Goondiwindi, however Linda grew up in Mount Isa, in north-west Queensland. She has 22 years' experience as a social worker in rural, remote and urban centres. Linda is particularly passionate about child protection after working for 17 years in this area of social work. Following seven years as a Director of Social Work for Queensland Health, Linda returned in 2017 to child protection as Manager of the Mount Isa and Gulf Child Safety Service Centre, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women where she is currently employed.

Throughout her career Linda has maintained a relationship with higher education. She was an adjunct lecturer for James Cook University in northern

Queensland in the areas of social work theory, ethical practice and cultural practice, and continues to guest lecture. Linda collaborated as a researcher and co-author of *Murri Way! Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders reconstruct social welfare practice* with Robyn Lynn, Rosamund Thorpe, Debra Miles, Christine Cutts and Anne Butcher (1998).

Linda is committed to the profession of social work. Prior to becoming a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers National Board, she was a past President of the AASW North Queensland Branch. Linda has been full Director of the Board since 1 November 2017.

In the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Board member, Linda aims to promote the wealth of knowledge and cultural expertise of Indigenous social workers across the helping continuum and to increase the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within the membership of the AASW. She also plans to campaign for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to undertake studies in social work as a career option as that embraces



the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sense of equality and community.

Linda believes that her role on the National Board also provides an invaluable dual opportunity. First to provide public commentary on subjects such as inequality, the influence of media and political agendas, structures and systems that impact negatively on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and, second, to promote the progressive and successful programs, activities and successes of Indigenous peoples and communities.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

monash.edu/pubs/2017handbooks/courses/M6022.html

monash.edu/study/courses/find-a-course/2018/mental-health-science-m6022

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MONASH University

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN 2017–2019

The AASW is committed to reconciliation, and our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is an important step in our journey. We published our second RAP in June 2017. The AASW is accountable to Reconciliation Australia to make sure that the RAP is implemented.



Through our RAP, we look to progress in our efforts to demonstrate a commitment to our core values and objectives as an association as they apply to addressing past and continuing disadvantages imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes a particular focus on building meaningful relationships and working together for a more just Australia.

Our RAP involves the AASW working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to test and trial approaches that build relationships, show respect and improve opportunities. It will enable us to continue to build the right foundations for long-term outcomes.

The purpose of the AASW's RAP is to:

- describe the strategy of the Board to achieve reconciliation and promote understanding
- recognise the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians
- demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing through incorporation into social work theory and practice
- facilitate social workers becoming better informed about working with First Australians to achieve the provision of culturally competent, safe sensitive practice.

The National RAP will be complemented by branch-based reconciliation activities to further the achievement of these goals. The National RAP will continue to be led and monitored by the RAP Working Group, which will be a Committee of the Board.

Our vision for reconciliation is one of increased understanding, and appreciation across the Australian social work profession about the histories and cultures of the First Australians. We envisage the development of meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as colleagues, community members and people who use our services founded on recognition and respect. Through this RAP, we move forward together in the spirit of reconciliation and solidarity.

Critical reflection is a core element in social work practice and it is appropriate at this stage of our reconciliation journey to develop this RAP to deepen our commitment to reconciliation.

This RAP continues to build on work from our first RAP, which began in 2013. It has an increasing emphasis on building partnerships and working together to achieve real change in the areas of health and wellbeing, education, employment and child placement. Most importantly, it continues to promote the social work principles of recognition, respect, dignity and inclusion.

We also seek to build upon the key learnings and challenges of our previous RAP, including greater monitoring of the implementation of the actions and accountability in relation to meeting the deliverables.

AASW RAP goals 2017-2019

Goal 1: Developing meaningful relationships built on trust

Goal 2: Engendering respect and enhancing skills among social workers

Goal 3: Creating opportunities

Goal 4: Tracking our progress and reporting

RAP: Our progress so far

In December 2017, the AASW reported what had been achieved so far against the RAP 2017-2019 commitments. The first few months were instrumental in establishing the key groups, reporting guidelines and the implementation of key actions. The RAP Working Group has met four times in the first quarter of the two-year time period, given the need to establish the foundations of our implementation strategy. In that time, we have achieved several highlights including:

- Meeting with Federal Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Indigenous Health, Ken Wyatt AM, MP and Natalie Hutchins MP - Victorian Minister for Aboriginal

Affairs, Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence to discuss key issues and the role of social work.

- Establishing cultural competency training for all AASW staff and in the process, have built a stronger working relationship with key organisations, including SNAICC.

Through our RAP, we look to progress in our efforts to demonstrate a commitment to our core values and objectives as an association as they apply to addressing past and continuing disadvantages imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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AASW Branch RAP-up

The objectives within the AASW RAP are being actioned across Australia, facilitated by the branches. National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is held from 27 May to 3 June 2018.

Australian Capital Territory

- Organising an event in the lead up to National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and identifying key collaboration partners

New South Wales

- Organising an event called A Reconciliation Conversation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social workers for NRW
- Permission received from Editor of *Koori Mail* to reprint one article from the publication per month in NSW e-News

North Queensland

- Hosting an evening with AASW Board member, Linda Ford, who is the Chair of the RAP Working Group and former North Queensland Branch President.

Northern Territory

- Planning an event for NRW

Queensland

- Approached the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) to appear as the featured organisation in the Summer/Autumn edition of the *Queensland Social Work*
- Facebook posts for Australia Day Change the Date statement reached 1,229 people

South Australia

- Notice of AASW support for NRW 2018 posted on social media
- An end of year cultural sensitivity immersion event was hosted at an Indigenous venue with culturally relevant catering including a re-framing workshop
- Facebook and SA e-News promotion of cultural awareness and inclusivity events around the state
- BMC Indigenous representative elected for two-year period

Victoria

- Continued liaising with SNAICC regarding development of two CPD activities for Victorian members in the year ahead
- Advertised NAIDOC Award Nominations in Victoria e-News
- Advertised NAIDOC Week Funding in Victoria e-News

Western Australia

- Signed the Australian Indigenous Health Infonet memorandum of understanding
- Meeting with Margie Ugle - Coordinator Noongar Child Protection Council
- Participation at Smoking Ceremony at Boulders Beach
- Shared article on Facebook for 10th anniversary of National Apology

AASW AUSTRALIA DAY STATEMENT

'AUSTRALIA DAY SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE OF ALL AUSTRALIANS'

In January, AASW National President Christine Craik and AASW Director - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Linda Ford released a joint statement calling for a national day that is inclusive of all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Every Australian should have the opportunity to celebrate our national identity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

However, we must acknowledge that the current date for Australia Day makes it difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to enjoy and celebrate, as for many it commemorates the beginning of Western colonisation and the devastation that this had on Australia's first peoples.

We understand that for these reasons, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the 26th of January is a day of mourning, not celebration, and continuing to hold Australia Day on this specific date reinforces the continued lack

of respect given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in not recognising and acknowledging this.

This debate underpins the acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as the first peoples of Australia, the history and the ongoing effects of that history today and gives us an opportunity to move forward by taking the proactive and inclusive step of changing the date so that all Australians can share in our nation's celebratory day.

While it is important to talk about the continuing disadvantages, it is also important to acknowledge the strengths, resilience and survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As social workers, we will continue to work in consultation and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian leaders, groups and communities towards reconciliation. Central to this, is supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian leadership and enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian voices to be heard and respected.

In part, this is about acknowledging that the date that we have chosen to celebrate our national day excludes a significant and important part of our population and making a commitment to changing it.

•



CLOSE THE GAP DAY

On National Close the Gap Day on 15 March, the AASW called for significant and immediate action to address the entrenched inequality and disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL APOLOGY

On the anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) called for immediate action from Australian governments to work with Indigenous leaders and communities towards reconciliation and social justice.

In a statement at the time of the anniversary on 13 February this year, AASW National President Christine Craik said, that, although the government's formal apology was 'an important step', little had changed in the years since.

Christine commented on the 'staggering level' of inequality for Indigenous people that exists in areas such as health, education and employment. She made particular reference to the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who are now nearly 10 times more likely to be removed from their family than non-Indigenous children.

'Two decades after the Bringing Them Home report and ten years after the Apology, the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care only seems to be growing', she said, calling for 'a greater investment

in early intervention and family support services.

'Governments need to begin by listening to Indigenous communities.'

The AASW policy is that consultation and partnership with Indigenous

leaders and groups needs to be the priority. Central to this is an Indigenous leadership role in the decision-making and Indigenous voices being heard and respected.

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Again, AASW National President Christine Craik pointed out that although some progress had been made the government had not met its targets for improving conditions for the Indigenous peoples.

'The latest Close the Gap progress report has highlighted how after twelve years, only three of the seven targets are on track to being met. Year after year the reports continue to demonstrate the staggering levels of inequality for Indigenous people across many areas including health, education and employment outcomes', Christine said.

Calling the figures 'shocking', she cited the fact that there have been no significant changes in life expectancy or child mortality rates since 2008 as 'evidence of the failure of consecutive governments to not only address inequality, but to also understand it.'

Christine called on all levels of government to begin by listening to Indigenous communities and to work with them with a clear focus on social justice and reconciliation, and to better support and resource Indigenous services to achieve far better outcomes.

'This begins by working with Indigenous communities in

partnership and collaboration, drawing upon their knowledge and expertise' she said.

'Closing the gap is possible, but this needs to start by working towards meaningful relationships with Indigenous leaders and communities built on recognition, respect and trust.'

•

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY FOR JOURNAL

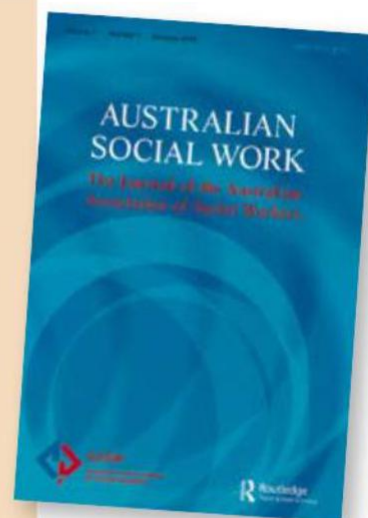
In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Editorial Board and the AASW Board of Directors, *Australian Social Work* now carries an acknowledgement of country. The newly added Acknowledgement will feature on the inside front cover of the next issue, in April, and all subsequent issues.

The Journal is also increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Editorial Advisors as part of initiatives to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and reviewers. If any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers are interested in contributing to the Journal as authors or reviewers they are most welcome to contact the Editor – fiona.mcdermott@monash.edu

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians, whose lands, winds, and waters we all now share, and pay respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures, which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.

The aims and scope of *Australian Social Work* demonstrate commitment to acknowledging and understanding the historical and contemporary injustice and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the implications of this for knowledge development, practice, policy, and education.



FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR STUDIES INDIGENOUS BODY DYSPHORIA



In 2017 Dr Stephanie Gilbert was awarded the prestigious Fulbright Indigenous Postdoctoral Scholarship, and this year will undertake research at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the United States.

Stephanie's academic career has been centred around questions of Indigenous identity, particularly on how the policy of removal of Aboriginal children has affected their sense of themselves and their culture.

In her Fulbright research on the subject 'Living as Indigenous: Inside the Dysmorphic Body', she will look at whether body dysphoria is experienced among the First Nations people of North America and whether this kind of memory becomes entrenched in the body and is passed down generations through the epigenome.

Stephanie started her career as a social worker and this has informed her later work. For her honours degree in social work at James Cook University she studied the forced removal of Aboriginal children that resulted in the Stolen Generations, setting the course for her later academic work.

While working in Indigenous enabling education in northern Queensland Stephanie began her master's degree examining the ways in which Aboriginal female children were focused on for removal. After a move to Newcastle and a period working in adolescent foster care, Stephanie returned to university to work in Aboriginal education and completed her PhD – from the University of Newcastle where she now teaches – 'Women and Constructing Remembering: Identity Formation in the Stolen Generations'.

Stephanie Gilbert's career trajectory has taken her into the academic discipline of Indigenous Studies, but she clearly values her start in social work. She remains a member of the AASW and keeps other links with the association, and her work on the Stolen Generations, child protection policies and Indigenous identity are certainly of interest to the profession.

THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FLAGS

'Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags demonstrates Australia's recognition of First Nation peoples, promoting a sense of community partnership and a commitment toward reconciliation' says Reconciliation Australia.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are well known to most Australians. Both were proclaimed official flags of Australia in legislation in 1995, and take their place next to the national and state flags as symbols of Australia.

The Australian Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag are quite different in design to one another, as each represents a distinct culture.

Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia, designed the Australian Aboriginal flag, attaching great significance to the three colours, black, red and yellow, in the simple design. The black of the top half of the flag represents the Aboriginal peoples, on red for the red earth, with a central yellow disc, for the sun. According to Thomas, the red for the earth relates to red ochre and signifies the Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relationship to the

land; the yellow sun is a symbol of the giver of life and protector.

The Aboriginal flag made its first appearance in Adelaide in 1971 when it was first flown at Victoria Square on National Aborigines Day. It was then selected as the flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy the following year.

The design of the Torres Strait Islander flag, by the Bernard Namok of Thursday Island, was the result of a competition organised by the Island Coordinating Council. It was adopted by the Council in May 1992.

Again the colours of the flag are symbolic of the culture it represents. The green of the top and bottom of the flag stand for the land and the central blue panel the sea, whereas the black strips between the blue and green represent the Torres Strait Islander people. The central images on the flag are white to symbolise peace. These

images are of a dhari, a headdress, representing the Torres Strait Islander people, and a five-pointed star that represents the five major island groups in the Torres Strait and the importance of navigation in the culture.

The flag was recognised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in June 1992 and given equal prominence with the Aboriginal flag.

For further information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, including information on copyright:

https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/qa_flags_pdf.pdf

www.pmc.gov.au/government/australian-national-symbols/australian-flags

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A HELPFUL GUIDE: WELCOME TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS AND ELDERS

The AASW makes an Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders at all our functions, events and internal meetings. We also have an Acknowledgement on our website and in the footer of emails.

What is a Welcome to Country?

A **Welcome to Country** is a protocol where Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners welcome others to the land of their ancestors.

The Welcome to Country ceremony is carried out at significant events and formal functions involving people from other parts of the country or from overseas. This practice shows respect for the Traditional Owners and Elders of a particular area or region.

When is a Welcome to Country required?

A Welcome to Country should be conducted at major public functions. Appropriate functions include government organised, funded and co-funded events such as:

- openings of festivals
- award programs
- conferences
- significant community engagement forums.

A Welcome to Country should be incorporated into events where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, programs or services are being promoted.

What is an Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders?

The **Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders** differs from a Welcome to Country in that it can be delivered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

This practice demonstrates respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and recognises the importance of acknowledging Traditional Owners of the land and/or sea.

A master of ceremonies either introduces the Traditional Owner representative to provide a Welcome to Country or makes an Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders. Other key speakers and participants may wish to take the opportunity to also precede their discussions with an acknowledgement.

A short pause should be taken after the acknowledgement as a sign of respect, before proceedings continue.

An example of an Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and Elders

'I would like to respectfully acknowledge the <<name of Group if known>> Traditional Owners of the land <<and/or sea>> on which this event is taking place, and Elders both past and present.

'I also recognise those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will leave a lasting legacy for future Elders and leaders.'

Is there a fee for a Welcome to Country?

Most Traditional Owner groups or representative groups will require a nominal fee to cover the cost of conducting the Welcome to Country ceremony.

A Welcome to Country that includes a traditional dance or smoking ceremony will generally involve a more substantial payment.

Source: <https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/welcome-to-country/index.html>

CAPTAIN STARLIGHT: PROVIDING CHILDREN WITH A POSITIVE HEALTH EXPERIENCE

DR CLAIRE TREADGOLD

Captain Starlight is a superhero with a superpower of a different kind. Actually, there are almost 150 Captain Starlights across Australia, who engage with children and adolescents through activities such as art, music, story-telling, comedy and games to reduce anxiety, alleviate boredom and provide a positive health experience. Having Captain Starlight on hand has encouraged attendance at clinics, helping improve health outcomes for children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Captain Starlight program was first launched in 1991 by the Starlight Children's Foundation (Starlight). Starlight works to develop patient-centred programs that have a positive impact on seriously ill children, adolescents and their families. Programs are delivered both in hospitals and in the community, and aim to support the total care of children, young people and their families who are living with a serious illness or a chronic health condition.

In 2013, Starlight joined forces with health professionals to develop the 'Healthier Futures Initiative' to help children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through a collaborative care approach. By engaging children and communities through song, dance and storytelling, Starlight has helped enhance their health care experience, promoting prevention and early intervention.

The rapport built with children and families has also been reported to alleviate anxiety in children who travel from remote communities to the city for treatment, with the highly visible Captain Starlights providing a much-needed sense of connection and familiarity. This contact is often initiated by a local social worker who will contact Starlight to alert the team to a child in need of support.

A great example of the Healthier Futures Initiative in action is a partnership between Starlight and Earbus Foundation of WA (Earbus), that aims to improve the ear health of Indigenous children in rural and remote Western Australia. When Earbus and Starlight travel together to Indigenous communities, the Earbus team provides ear screening, surveillance and treatments while Captain Starlights assist in attracting children to clinics, and provide opportunities for entertainment and play for those waiting to be seen by the clinical team.



Feedback from the travelling clinicians and local social workers indicates the benefits of this integrated approach as both a drawcard and a mechanism for reducing anxiety in children. Without the engagement or distraction provided by the Captain Starlights, children often leave prematurely, not receiving the full range of appointments or treatment they require. Captain Starlights also help enhance the relationship between the Indigenous community and health professionals. By working with the youngest members of the community, the program aims to facilitate a change in attitude towards healthcare, creating a positive, anxiety-free healthcare experience.

Three years into the partnership with Starlight, Earbus has achieved a reduction in referrals for the serious ear condition Otitis Media, and the level of chronic ear disease has fallen below the World Health Organization benchmark for the first time. Earbus and Starlight have also noted additional benefits from integrating care and collaborating with each other, including the ability to pool limited resources, increased credibility, and enhanced awareness of both organisations across the regions.

In 2017, Captain Starlight worked alongside social workers and other health professionals to make clinic visits a more positive experience for over 9,700 children living in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in WA and NT.

Dr Claire Treadgold is the National Manager, Research and Evaluation for Starlight Children's Foundation.



April 2018 - Opinion

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN NEED LOVING, SAFE AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HOMES

Recent arguments about the removal of Indigenous children from their families fail to appreciate the complexity of the issue. Reducing the debate to oversimplified understandings of the factors that contribute to the devastating disparity in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children will only further entrench this inequality.

The rates of child sexual abuse amongst Indigenous children is a serious issue that needs action. Calls for the increased removal of children as the main solution is part of the problem and symptomatic of the inter-generational and systemic policies of discrimination that have contributed to the situation we witness today.

All children have the right to a safe, happy and emotionally supported childhood where they are nurtured and loved. This is beyond debate. Children

and young people who come into the care of the state are amongst the most vulnerable members of society and their best interest and safety is of the utmost importance in all decision making. This should include attention to their physical, emotional, social, educational and cultural needs.

Aboriginal children should be placed with Aboriginal families. This is the central idea of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in all states and territories.

Having learnt from history and the significance of cultural identity for healthy development, the Principle states that children who are removed from their families must be housed with Indigenous family members or Indigenous foster carers. In reality, the proportion of children placed according to the Principle decreased from 74% in 2007-08 to 67.6% in 2016-17.

The argument is often made that there are not enough Aboriginal families to foster or adopt, but there are many



Aboriginal families that could foster and adopt, however are unable to due to the barriers and lack of support provided. This needs to be acknowledged so that the systems change in order to increase Aboriginal fostering and adoption capacity.

The reality is that the bureaucratic process to foster or adopt, is based on what is comfortable for white, middle class families and this can create huge barriers for members of the Aboriginal community. It is also full of systemic bias.

For example, you need a certain literacy level and decent formal education just to be able to comprehend and complete the application that is required. These things do not equate to being able to provide a safe and loving home. Additionally, there are significant barriers for those who speak another language or who may not have had the opportunity to reach a certain level of formal education.

Another example of a systemic barrier in this process is that of requiring a police check, without a thorough understanding of the contributing factors to any positive screens in Aboriginal families. Statistics show us that Aboriginal people currently make up 27% of the prison population, while only being 3% of the general population, and we know that many of the same behaviours that see Aboriginal people incarcerated, do not see white people incarcerated. The onerous process of justifying why their criminal history is no longer relevant at a later stage of their life is often a deterrent to them attempting to foster or adopt.

The systems are confusing and hard to navigate, as well as creating barriers. Other systemic issues faced by members of the Aboriginal community, such as significant overcrowding in housing and other social housing problems can also impact on these processes.

When applying to foster or adopt, every person living in the household undergoes a background check and this can also work against Aboriginal families, with multiple generations living under one roof, and a cultural expectation that you don't refuse a member of the family who needs a home. What kind of choice do we leave these families when they have to decide between a young man who may have been incarcerated for a trivial offence, and an application to foster or adopt?

Other examples of systemic bias include the assumption that everyone has a birth certificate and identification; many of these families include older family members whose births may not have even been registered. The application process also includes a household safety assessment, based very much on white, middle class notions of household safety. Of course there are basic standards that must be met, but the inability of the process to understand culture creates significant barriers for many Aboriginal families.

We need to start by listening to those who have been removed from family and culture and the impact that this has had on their lives. Children who do not continue to live in Aboriginal communities

and subsequently lose their culture need to negotiate this alienation for the rest of their lives, leading in part to the poorer outcomes we continue to see in the Close the Gap and other reports.

Governments have a responsibility to concentrate efforts and services on creating environments in which families are supported so that the various factors that increase the likelihood of child abuse and neglect are substantially reduced. Indigenous children are ten times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Indigenous children.

We currently have a situation where state and territory government spends only 17% of total child protection funding ([\\$700 million a year](#)) on family support services for children and their families, compared with 83% (\$3.5 billion) on child protection services. The system is punitive and intervenes when it is too late.

There is no single solution to addressing this issue, but any action must begin by working with Indigenous communities in partnership and collaboration, respecting culture and drawing upon their knowledge and expertise. It also means understanding the historical and social contexts with a commitment from all levels of government to better supporting and resourcing Indigenous services so we can assure that every child has a loving, safe and culturally appropriate home.

Christine Craik is the National President of the Australian Association of Social Workers

Linda Ford is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative Director of the Australian Association of Social Workers

[Originally published by the ABC.](#)

The inability of the process to understand culture creates significant barriers for many Aboriginal families.

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY 2018: 'PROMOTING COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY'

The AASW led the World Social Work Day celebrations around Australia on 20 March this year. The theme was Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability.

World Social Work Day has been recognised since 1983. It was established by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the body that sets the theme each year and has consultative status to the United Nations, representing social workers globally. World Social Work Day is when we celebrate and recognise social workers as champions for social justice, self-determination and human rights.

Organisations also held celebrations of their own for their social work staff, using the AASW and IFSW co-branded poster and resources from our website, which was wonderful to see. Thank you for joining us in celebrations around the country this World Social Work Day. We look forward to doing it all again next year.

#SocialWorkDayAU

Our social media campaign using Thunderclap was a success, with 313 supporters spreading the word on their Facebook and Twitter pages, reaching nearly 170,000 of their friends and followers in 12 countries. In addition, elected representatives such as Senators Deborah O'Neill, Kristina Keneally and Andrew Bartlett and Rachel Sanderson MP, state member for Adelaide tweeted their support, as did Mission Australia and the Mental Health Professionals Network, and many individuals and organisations.

Members also chose to share their social work stories with us, which we shared on social media.



AASW
Australian Association
of Social Workers

PROMOTING COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Celebrating social workers making a difference
this World Social Work Day, 20 March 2018

Support our
THUNDERCLAP
Sign up now!
#SocialWorkDayAU

Because of you, **313** supporters
shared our message to reach

			
170 K PEOPLE	12 COUNTRIES	157 CITIES	33 DAYS

THANK YOU!

POWERED BY **THUNDERCLAP**



CEO Cindy Smith was interviewed by Health Professional Radio, an international online radio station, about the AASW and World Social Work Day.

National President Christine Craik addressed social workers at the annual breakfast on World Social Work Day, Melbourne, Australia. Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs gave the keynote address and Honorary Life Membership was presented to Bernie Chatley at the breakfast held at the University of Melbourne.

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Branch held a breakfast at the Canberra Institute of Technology with guest speaker, former ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope. Jon led a Q&A on his experience as advisor to the CEO of the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, and gave an insight into his time in government.

Jon spoke of the continued, and in some cases, growing gaps in quality of life and access to services between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their non-Indigenous counterparts. He underlined the important work that social workers play in closing the gaps through providing services and advocacy, and called on social workers and the wider ACT community to strive to achieve the elusive notion of a fair and just society. Social workers in attendance enjoyed the celebration and the breakfast inspired a renewed enthusiasm and commitment to the profession.



Jon Stanhope, former ACT Chief Minister, addresses social workers

Victoria

The AASW Victoria Branch hosted a breakfast at the University of Melbourne at which Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs delivered the World Social Work Day keynote address on the topic of 'Social Justice in a Post-truth World'.



L-R Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs and AASW National President Christine Craik



L-R AASW Victoria Branch President Glenda Kerridge, Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs, Honorary Life Member Bernie Chatley



Emeritus Professor Gillian Triggs, AASW Victoria Branch President Glenda Kerridge

New South Wales



L-R Professor Jim Ife, Western Sydney Uni, David Keegan NSW Branch President and Naomi Spencer, NSW Branch Vice-President

More than 40 members joined the NSW Branch for the celebration of World Social Work Day.

The keynote speaker was Professor Jim Ife from Western Sydney University, who presented ideas for achieving progressive change in social work in Australia. He spoke about the need for a paradigm shift to counter moves such as the privatisation of the welfare state, workforce controls and the silencing of advocacy organisations, with strong communities being key to achieving this.

This was followed by the presentation of the 2018 Social Justice Award, which was awarded to Sue Foley. Sue was recognised for her outspoken advocacy in the area of child protection. She was a pivotal player in the establishment of the [Western Sydney Shaken Baby Prevention Project](#), a large-scale advocacy project that aims to educate and empower those who care for small children. Sue is currently the Director of the [NSW Children's Court Clinic](#), the first social worker to hold this position. [Read more about Sue's fascinating social work and child protection journey](#)

There were many other enjoyable events held around the state.

Queensland

The Queensland Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers and the Griffith University School of Human Services and Social Work hosted their World Social Work Day at Southbank, Brisbane.

AASW National President Christine Craik was one of the panellists at a panel discussion and Q&A session that considered the role of social work in responding to impending natural disasters, in disaster recovery and in rebuilding community resilience to these events. The panel discussed the role of the profession in activism around environmental issues that compound the severity and frequency of natural disasters.

World Social Work Day events were also held in other parts of south-east Queensland, including the Gold Coast and Ipswich.



L-R Donna McAuliffe, Lesley Chenoweth and Christine Craik

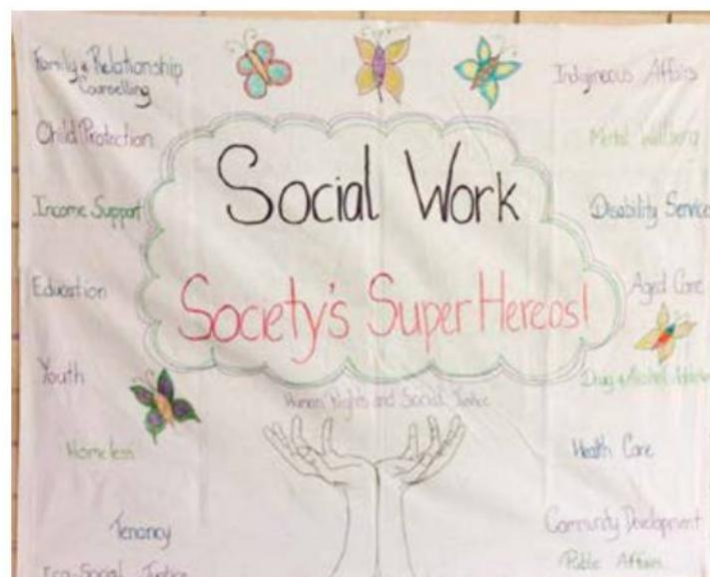


L-R Ellen Beaumont, Fotina Hardy

North Queensland

North Queensland Branch held breakfast events in Townsville, Cairns and Mackay presenting an opportunity to bring social workers together to recognise their commitment and achievements in making a difference to the lives of people, families and communities across the region.

In Townsville, Dr Peter Jones, a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Human Services at James Cook University addressed the Townsville group on the topic of 'Greening Social Work'. Peter outlined some of the areas where social workers are already involved in dealing with the consequences of climate change and how social workers have the opportunity to become advocates for climate change mitigation and adaptation.



Northern Territory

Josephine Lee was the winner of the Mary Moylan Award, held at Parliament House on Friday, 23 March. Josephine was chosen from a strong field of social workers doing great work in the Northern Territory.

Josephine has an extensive career in social work and has made a significant contribution to her field of practice. Josephine is a Gudjula woman who has held senior roles in health, education and child protection and she is active and well regarded in her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities providing ongoing support and advocacy.

Josephine promotes decolonising practices noting that the personal and the political are integrated. She has been a member of the AASW for many years and has been a member of both the NT Branch Committee and the National Board during her twenty years in the Territory. She has previously been selected as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative on the Board of Directors of AASW and Chair of the Reconciliation Action Plan Taskforce.



Josephine Lee, winner of the Mary Moylan Award, displays her certificate

Western Australia

In Perth, the branch celebrated World Social Work Day with a breakfast with keynote speaker Tricia Murray, social worker and Chief Executive Officer of Wanslea Family Services. Tricia's address was on 'meshing research and practice: sustaining professionals, agency and the community'. Twenty-eight social workers gathered together to celebrate World Social Work Day and to

hear Tricia talk about how Wanslea has strategically realigned its operations to ensure that it uses, implements, develops and builds evidence-based practice. The impact of research in the organisation improves service delivery, the development of programs, with staff being able to access research and evidence to inform their work.

South Australia



The SA Branch World Social Work Day breakfast was a sold-out success. Sue Vardon AO was the guest speaker of the breakfast, with the topic of her address being: Social workers can, and are, influencing social policy and political advocacy via 'mastering the digital space'.

It was also the book launch of Felicity Chapman's book ['Counselling and psychotherapy with older people in care: A support guide'](#).

L-R Azmiri Mian (MH PG convenor and AASW delegate on State MH Plan), SA Mental Health Commissioner Mr Chris Burns, SA Branch President Dr Mary Hood, Sue Vardon AO

Tasmania

The Tasmanian branch invited all social workers and social work students to World Social Work Day celebrations in three regions. They hosted breakfasts in Ulverstone, Launceston and Hobart for the social work community to come together to recognise and celebrate the valuable contributions of Tasmanian social workers to the wider community. Organisers and participants braved the cold snap to celebrate with us. In Hobart, guest speaker Meg Smith challenged social workers to seek knowledge on climate change and its predicted effects on vulnerable communities, and to then reflect on possible individual and systemic actions that could be taken.



L-R George Ramm (BMC member, UTAS Student representative), Meg Smith (WSWD guest speaker, BMC member), Jacqui Russell (Branch Vice President), Sandra Fox (Branch Manager)

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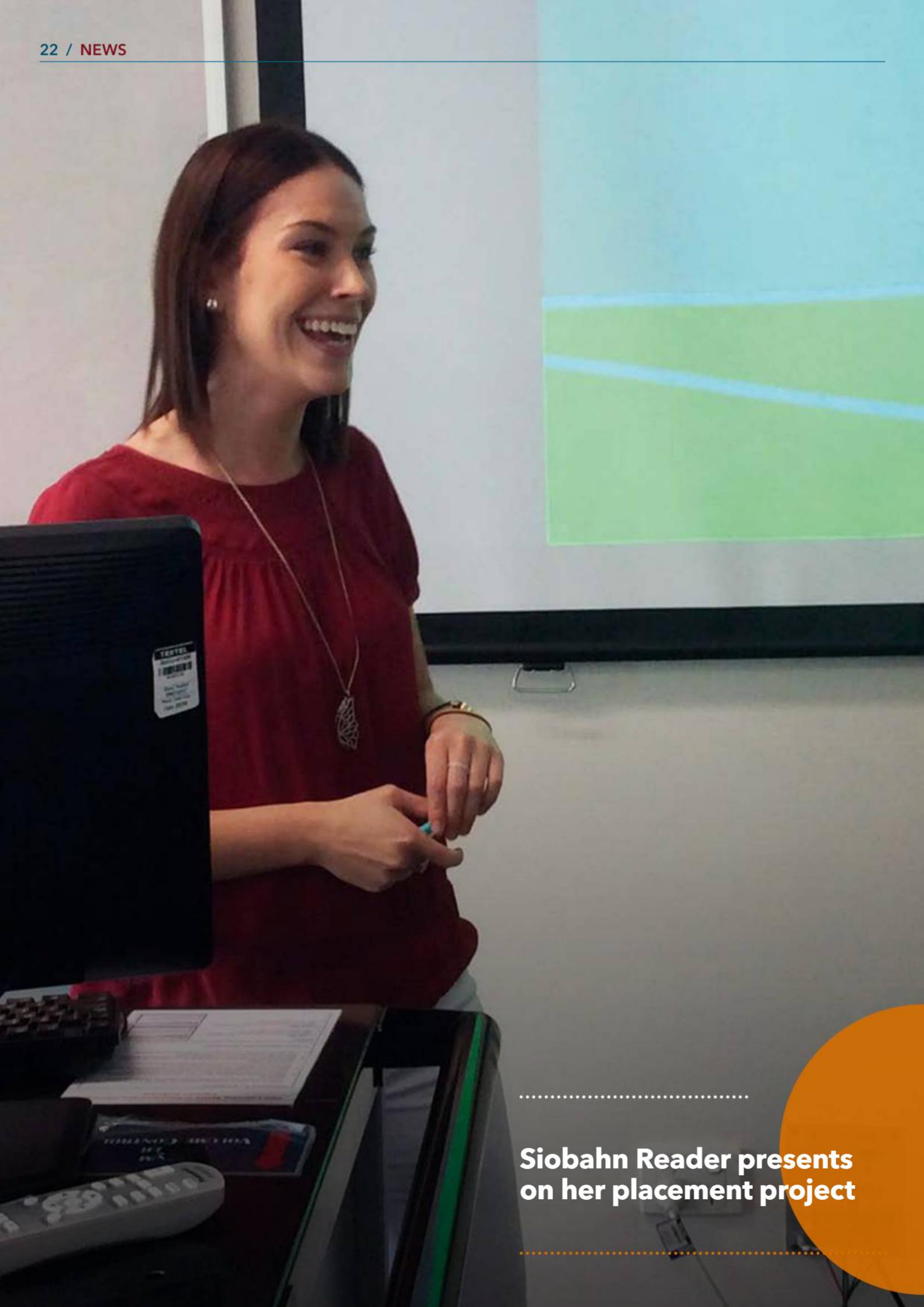
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**Siobahn Reader presents
on her placement project**

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TALENTED SOCIAL WORKERS SHOWCASE INITIATIVES AT STUDENT CONFERENCE

More than 40 soon-to-be social work graduates from Australian Catholic University (ACU) demonstrated how their four years of study would translate to the workplace at the National School of Allied Health student conference on 2 November 2017.

Social work professional development sessions and oral presentations were among the wide range of work showcased on the Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra campuses.

Students presented case study and community development data from placements undertaken at public sector and non-profit community organisations, where they interacted with clients, communities and colleagues to make a difference from a variety of theoretical perspectives, in a broad range of health and welfare contexts.

Siobhan Reader from the Strathfield Campus in Sydney presented on her placement project at New Horizons, a non-profit organisation focusing on mental health and disability. New Horizons' Respite Centre aims to encourage resilience among groups of men and women.

'Being part of the Centre's development in giving individuals a voice and undertaking background research in a field that I wasn't familiar with, were among the best aspects of this project,' said Siobhan.

Siobhan is excited by her next project overseas which will further enhance her experience and skills in the profession. She will be undertaking project base work with the Marist community in the Philippines, contributing to the development of a boys' shelter for orphans experiencing disadvantage and social isolation.

Students in Brisbane reflected on their placements with Indigenous agencies as well as in other diverse fields including those dealing with domestic violence, child protection, aged care and disabilities.

National Head, School of Allied Health, Professor Christine Imms said the conference program was rich in diversity with project reports from a range of settings. 'I congratulate the students on their endeavours, the quality of their work and professionalism of their presentations. I also acknowledge and thank their lecturers and supervisors on their support of our students,' Professor Imms said.

ACU prepares future social workers with specialised knowledge to work across a wide range of health and human services agencies. For more information, visit acu.edu.au.

School of Allied Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University



2017 cohort of social work students and staff, ACU Strathfield campus



PRACTISING INDIGENOUS SOCIAL WORK

STEPHANIE GILBERT

It has been 41 years since the acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through special programs at James Cook University of North Queensland.

From 1977, students entered teaching programs and later, in 1985, entered community welfare programs and entry widened from there. In those early years, the goal set by education professionals, including the National Aboriginal Education Committee which was itself established in 1977, was to reach a target of 1000 teachers by 1990.

The special direct intake program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at James Cook University did not start until the 1990s, which is interesting, given that the University was a leader in the field of Aboriginal higher education at that time.

When I headed off to university in 1985, I left a care placement in the state of Queensland having re-entered care as a teenager. This spurred me on having experienced by then, as a stolen generation person, adoption, fostering, and institutionalisation. There were three options available for special entry into university for Aboriginal students like myself -teaching, performing arts and community welfare. As I was in Brisbane, the choice to study would have had to have been teaching at Griffith University, performing arts was in South Australia or I could move to Townsville and take up welfare. I did not want to be a teacher and as I was able then to earn an independent living allowance, I favoured the Townsville option. Once again, I entered another world where I knew nobody, did not know the area and indeed was not sure how to be Aboriginal.

Perhaps needless to say, the next years until my graduation in 1990 from an Associate Diploma of Community Welfare, Bachelor of Social Work, were a steep learning curve both in terms of community welfare, social work and indeed also negotiating being a young Aboriginal woman in the eighties. Part of that development was the articulation of Aboriginality within the study of social work. These sorts

of challenges were later discussed in the publication I created with other Indigenous social workers: *Our Voices: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Work* (2012).

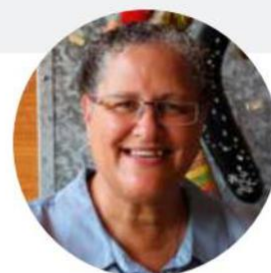
My own work also premised the experience of those, like myself, who came into contact with the child welfare systems through being part of the Stolen Generations. My initial interest was to investigate the legislation in Queensland that articulated how removal of Aboriginal children from their families could occur. I then moved on to look at how that was experienced by female Aboriginal children and on into their adulthood; whether the experience was different to that of males as legislation. Work by Heather Goodall, a historian, suggested removals had been motivated by different goals for each gender.

I am now in the midst of examining how this has impacted on the identity of Aboriginal people and more particularly Aboriginal women through a concept of body dysphoria. It is here that holds the most interesting points for social work and that is thinking about the identity of someone who looks at themselves and rather than seeing their brown arms, sees 'whiteness'. The idea of body dysphoria has come from my examination of a large number (100+) of stories from women who had been removed from their families of origin across Australia on the basis of their Aboriginality. The goal for removal was assimilation of Aboriginal people and so children were routinely taught to 'be white'. However, moving into adulthood and into the wider Australian society has meant the experience of being experienced as Aboriginal but having grown up being taught to believe they were not Aboriginal.

These personal experiences, alongside how it plays out through families is present at the coalface of social work

with Aboriginal people; whether they identify as Aboriginal or not; and, whether they have connection to 'Aboriginal cultures' or not.

In my own research, I am examining whether this has been a similar experience for children removed through the residential schools and experiences in Canada and the United States. I am also examining the concept of body dysphoria further to answer the question of whether we can inherit memory of invasion/colonisation and the consequent experiences through Australia's history. Many report the experience of shadows of memory, of smells, of familiarity in places they have never been. How do we balance our own trauma memory with that which we might have inherited in our epigenome? Why do some 'family traits' express in one and not in another? All of these questions speak to social work practice and how we engage with our colleagues and clients about ideas of resilience, strength and success.



About the author

Dr Stephanie Gilbert is currently on a post-doctoral Fulbright Scholarship at the American Indian Studies Center at the University of California, Los Angeles, exploring body memory, dysphoria and the possibility of the inheritance of memory in our epigenetics. She is usually Senior Lecturer at the Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle.

KNOWLEDGE RIGHTS: HOW DO FIRST AUSTRALIANS FARE?

MURRAY CREE

As Australia enters the knowledge economy, questions arise as to who benefits in this paradigm shift from property, machine and financial assets to the ownership of intellectual assets. First Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders) naturally arise as claimants for the recognition of their knowledge rights. 'But what are those rights?' Murray Cree asks.

Knowledge is a complex entity to define. At one extreme of conceptualisation there is the theoretical definition while at the other extreme is the proven and tested definition, often represented and measured as competence through evidence of successful practice.

Professional social work qualifications typically require practice validation through internships or supervised practice placements in industry settings. The AASW *Practice Standards 2013* tilt towards the competency end of the definition continuum.

When it comes to assessing the knowledge rights of First Australians, the theoretical versus the practice polemics become clearly evident. Perhaps the most public debate has arisen around the knowledge rights of First Australian artists. What value is given to cultural history through art?

[An obvious example is the winning entry in the 2016 33rd Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards \(NATSIAAs\).](#) It is titled *Tribal Abduction*. The painting is a confrontingly stark view of First Australian history since the time of English colonial settlement. It depicts knowledge and history borne of experience, not simply historical documents of a 200-year period of cultural trauma.

Its artist is Darwin local, Harold Thomas (Bundoo), who descends from the Luritja and Wambai people of central Australia. He presents his winning work as a record of painful memory that is still felt today. For First Australians, 1788 has not been a lengthy time milestone when contrasted to their 50,000 years of prior settlement.

For some observers, the work is too vivid and challenging because of its representation of oppression through the colonial experiment. For example, the figures of a nun ready to cover the naked baby in a white cloth as it is taken from its mother.

The win in the NATSIAAs with *Tribal Abduction* is not Thomas's first experience of artistic recognition. At 24 years of age, fresh out of art school, in 1971 he created a simple red, black and yellow flag for the Land Rights movement. Today that flag is the symbolic flag of unity for First Australians, often flying alongside the colonial flag.

But therein lies the question of who owns the knowledge rights to the flag of the First Australians? Or for that matter, any distinct form of First Australian art or knowledge. Do these symbols of knowledge have a special intellectual property status? Do they attract a special tariff or royalty every time they are used or displayed? Why not?

Knowledge rights may be more than just products. They can extend to services and even original ideas. For example, the status of Uluru changed when the name changed from Ayers Rock. The change signified a process of recognition of traditional knowledge ownership. Today, the traditional inhabitants of the area, the Anangu people, lead walking tours to share with visitors the details of local plants, animals and dreamtime stories of their area.

Breaches of knowledge rights raise the issue of reparation. Terra Nullius never existed. It was a legal artefact of convenience created by Captain James Cook for the English government of the time. Cook did not comply with international law. How have the First Australians been compensated?

New Zealand's Maori people have fared a lot better when it comes to most forms of knowledge rights through the Waitangi Treaty. New Zealand social work teaching and practice deeply embeds Maori values, history and practices. After all, New Zealand is by law a bicultural nation.

All legal documents such as passports and agency signs are printed in two languages and two languages only.

Maori language and culture is mandatory throughout the school curriculum. Childcare has taken a leadership role through the Kohanga Reo program, where the entire day's activity is spoken only in Maori. Children attending from 2-5 years of age are immersed in Maori language and cultural behaviours. The 3-day funeral practices of the Tangi provide another example.

Perhaps Australian social workers have knowledge rights lessons to learn from New Zealand. A simple look at the professional journal, *Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work*, provides some examples of differences between these two neighbouring countries and their mindsets.

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About the author

Murray Cree is a sociology researcher, human services and business management consultant based in Warragul, regional Victoria. He is a past Professor of Business from Monash University. He has trained in social work and post-high school education in both New Zealand and Australia.



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WHY I BECAME A SOCIAL WORKER: LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE STOLEN GENERATION

MIIMI MORRIS

'What I have written is based on my experiences and I only speak from a place of truth for me and my people. I do not speak for the social work profession, I only speak from my experiences as an Aboriginal person. I do not endorse or uphold any particular theory or ideology or profession, and my writing speaks for itself. I really think what I am saying and writing needs to be acknowledged as a diverse way of looking at social work practices and supporting these diverse experiences of the profession.' Miimi Morris, a Kamilaroi, Dhungutti Koori woman, tells how she came to be a social worker.

As a young child I was taken from my Aboriginal family and community and was made a state ward. I had many experiences with social workers intervening in the life of my mother and myself and my nine siblings, who were also made state wards. Due to the systematic oppression and racism my family experienced I felt a sense of powerlessness and didn't experience social workers of the time to be child friendly or culturally safe and respectful towards me and my family.

I often felt that the social workers were supportive of the oppressive welfare system and non-Indigenous foster carers – my family's wishes never came into their practice concerns. I sensed a strong injustice as a young girl and said to myself that one day I would become a social worker and I would be different from the social workers involved in my life and I would help children, take notice of their feelings, and be kind to them.

I began my higher education at Tranby Aboriginal College at Glebe, Sydney, when I was 17 years old and learnt many things about my people that I had not been taught at school; the real truth of my past began to make sense as the truth about racism was exposed. I studied welfare at Tranby and my teacher at the time was a social worker who strongly encouraged me to study social work. I enrolled at Newcastle University in the Bachelor of Social Work in 1994.

Throughout my studies I challenged certain Western theories and methodologies and offered an Indigenous critique and ways of working and addressing Aboriginal disadvantages, the gaps in theory were apparent to me as an Aboriginal woman and I identified a need for a diverse analysis of social work theory and practice. I particularly added a depth to Aboriginal women's experiences and how feminist theory and theories of, for example, loss and grief didn't expose the realities of Aboriginal peoples' culture or lived experiences of racism in Australia.

I learnt resistance and resilience throughout my life and I became a person who fought for the rights of her people and I grounded myself in cultural understandings and historical untold truths to inform my social work practice. I am guided by my lived and cultural experiences and this informs my social work practice, however, the challenge is to work within mainstream models and at the same time pay honour to culture – cultural clashes of ideologies and systems of oppression still can impact upon practice. Western paradigms don't always fit an Aboriginal solution and often have been the very cause of the disadvantages my people face. My passion lies at the heart of promoting and practicing from an Aboriginal world view and how this can enhance a social work model of care.



About the author

Miimi Morris is a Kamilaroi, Dhungutti Koori woman and a social worker who works as an Aboriginal Family Counsellor. She gained a Bachelor of Social Work from Newcastle University in 1999 and has practised as an Aboriginal Social Work Counsellor in various locations throughout Australia, predominantly working for Aboriginal organisations and people.

My previous social work capacities have been as an Indigenous counsellor working in remote and rural settings and counselling Aboriginal people who have experienced transgenerational trauma and its impacts and ongoing effects of colonisation. I have worked across various domains and I have continually witnessed the devastating impacts of trauma on my people. The lack of cultural resources and healing spaces available for my people to be culturally empowered and strengthened against the impacts of colonisation makes social work practice in this area challenging. Throughout

my social work career I have chosen to continually advocate an alternative knowledge base and ways of practicing that incorporate an inclusive Aboriginal world view and endorses cultural practices within mainstream services and models of care.

I hope to undertake my Masters in Social Work this year and conduct research in the area of developing an Aboriginal framework that addresses colonisation trauma and to offer an Aboriginal social work perspective that acknowledges and supports cultural healing and connection to country. I feel

that to offer a genuine and just social work practice to my people it has to begin with connection to culture and country. Without acknowledging this, social work practice with Aboriginal people is fundamentally devoid of a legitimate meaning of what it is to be culturally empowered as an Aboriginal person and practice in a culturally competent way. Country and cultural connection seem to be a major missing link in treatment frameworks and theoretical understandings in Australia.

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SUPPORT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION IMPERATIVE TO ADDRESS THE OVER-REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

SAMMI LILLIE



In the 21st anniversary year of the Bringing Them Home report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system. Self-determination policies must be implemented and social workers should be advocating for this, says Sammi Lillie.

In 1997, Australia was shocked to learn that the 2,785 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in out-of-home care (OOHC) represented one in five of every child in OOHC across the nation. Latest data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that by June 2016 this number had increased by more than 600% to 16,846 and although they represent less than 5.5% of the population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children made up more than 36% of all children in OOHC nationally. Without change occurring, these figures are set to triple by 2035 according to the Family Matters report.

Although literature identifies intergenerational trauma and socio-economic disadvantage as factors, there are many other concerning drivers of over-representation. These are issues such as, risk-adverse child safety systems, limited legal support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, funding directed to mainstream organisations rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families providing kinship care, systemic racism, poor cultural understanding within the child protection system, and

ineffective and nationally inconsistent legislation, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).

Underlying all these issues is the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have self-determination. This right to self-determination is enshrined within the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and Article 18 clearly outlines Indigenous peoples' rights to participate in decision-making in all matters affecting them. Despite Australia's endorsement of the Declaration in 2009 child protection, like many other policy areas directly affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, remains under the control of non-Indigenous governance structures. Recently, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, reported that the Australian Government's continued failure to respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination and full and effective participation was alarming and had contributed to escalating child removal rates.

In November 2017, the Queensland Government passed the Child Protection Reform Amendment Act 2017. Included in



About the author

Sammi Lillie is a Master of Social Work student at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She has family connections to the La Perouse Aboriginal community in Sydney and has a passion for Aboriginal rights and family preservation, and culturally safe theories and practice frameworks. After three years as a community access worker in the mental health sector, Sammi is currently on the management committee for ANTAR Queensland and responsible for their Removal of Children advocacy campaign.



THE QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILD PROTECTION PEAK GOES GLOBAL!

CANDICE BUTLER

The 4th International Indigenous Voices in Social Work Conference was held in Alta, Norway, 11-14 June last year. Candice Butler, who attended the conference and presented a paper under the auspices of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, tells us what it was like.

the amendments are significant changes to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system. In particular, enabling legislation to allow the chief executive to delegate their functions and powers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entities; new principles that recognise the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self-determination; and embedding the ATSICPP into the Act. With the passing of this bill Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Queensland will move towards greater self-determination and reduced removals, however, nationally more needs to be done.

As one of more than 1100 delegates at the 2017 Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) national conference we called for urgent action to 'ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up safe, healthy and strong in their families and communities'. Specific calls included:

- a national target to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC through the Closing the Gap refresh
- over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC eliminated by 2040
- national minimum standards for the care and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- the need to uphold principles of self-determination.

The AASW Code of Ethics states 'In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on both assisting human functioning and identifying the system issues that create inequity and injustice'. It is imperative that we as social workers continue to advocate for policy changes to address self-determination. I strongly urge everyone to take the [Family Matters Pledge](#) to help achieve this. Family Matters is national initiative led by SNAICC to address over-representation through self-determination.

The principal purpose of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) is to promote and advocate the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families through effective partnerships and strategic collaborations. We provide leadership in advocacy and the development of policies, strategies and programs to resource, support and strengthen the capacity and capability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled child protection agencies in the interests of our children, families and communities.

My journey to the conference began with a conversation with the CEO, Natalie Lewis, and our Operations Manager, Nadia Currie. Both were supportive and encouraged me to submit an abstract. I was happy to do so as attending the conference would provide an opportunity to go international and speak about our practice standards, and how we ensure that the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are captured and heard. Furthermore, it would allow me to build strong partnerships with colleagues from across the globe.

Both my abstract and Nadia's were accepted, and so I arrived in Alta, Norway, on 10 June and Nadia joined me the following day. Lenny Dahlen, Member Engagement and Participation Coordinator, and Sidney Williams, Training and Education Coordinator, from QATSICPP met us there.

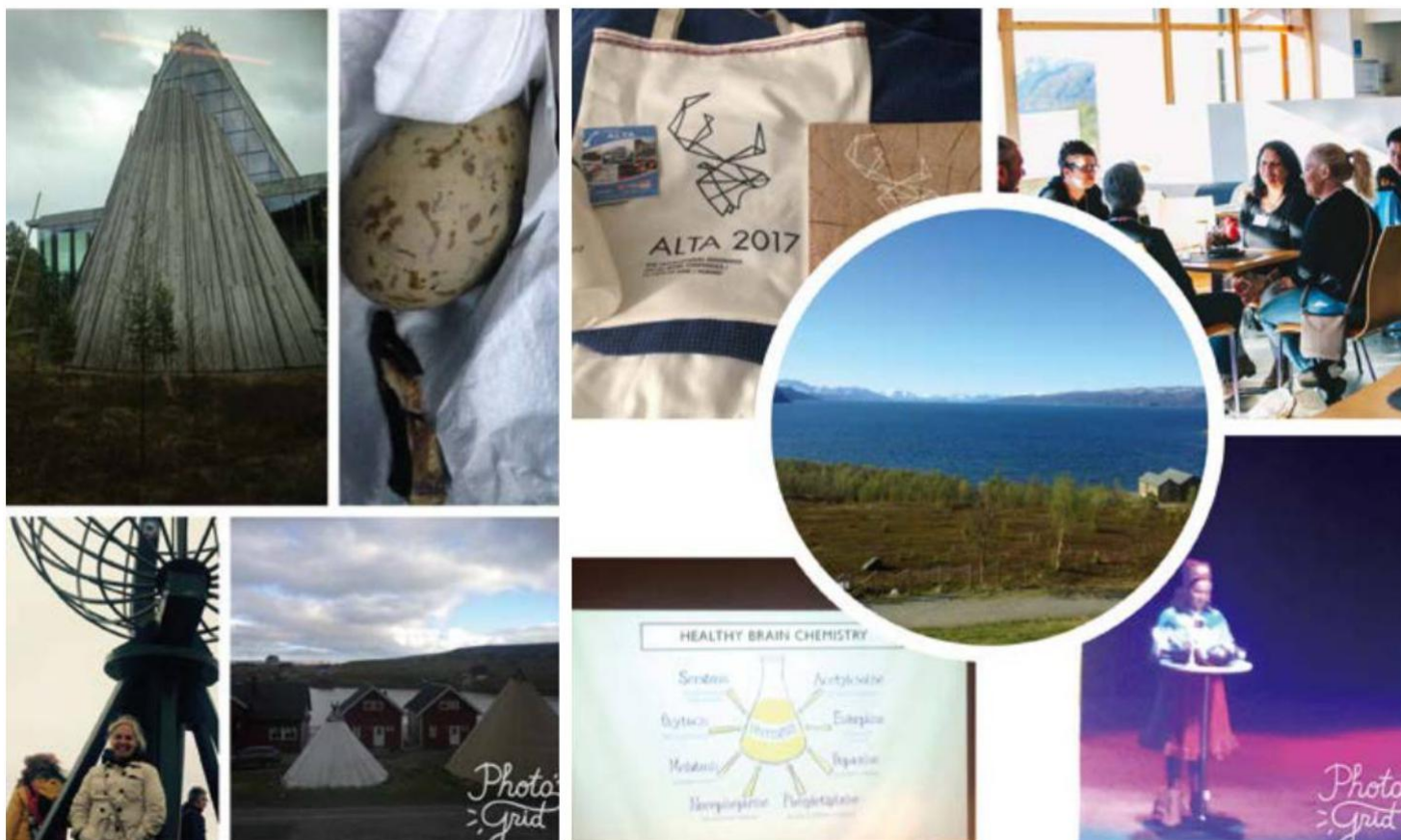
The first thing that hit me when I arrived in Alta was how beautiful the scenery was – it really was breathtaking and different from anywhere else I had been before. The other thing was the continuous daylight – yes it was daylight for 24 hours a day – but I think I was so excited and tired by the end of each day that I was still able to sleep.

On the first evening of the conference all the delegates visited the Alta Museum. The guided tour of Sami rock art was a great way to hear the stories of the Sami people, the indigenous people of Norway. It was also a really great way to get to meet everyone in an informal setting.

The first day of the conference was a real eye opener for me. Hearing about the history of the Sami people and what they have overcome made me realise the similarities, such as dispossession and racist policies, that we Indigenous peoples have all experienced across the globe and yet we are all not letting that get in the way of building a better future for our future generations.

On the day of my presentation I was extremely nervous, however, as soon as I began I knew that there was nothing to worry about. My peers were engaged and asked a lot of questions about how QATSICPP has developed our practice standards and the supervision framework. I spoke about how I used the practice standards throughout my time at the conference:

- *Engaging the child, family and community* – Introducing myself to as many people as possible and



sharing our experiences (and laughing a lot)

- *Identifying the storyline* - Why are we all here? What are we hoping to achieve?
- *Changing the storyline* - What am I going to do with the information that I am being exposed to during the conference?
- *Establishing a new storyline* - How do I make sure I share this and implement my learnings into my daily practice.

There were a number of highlights at the conference for me. I was absolutely blown away by the keynote presentation by Dr Michael Yellow Bird, titled 'Neurodecolonization: Examining the connections between mindfulness practices and traditional Indigenous knowledge and contemplative practices'. One area of the presentation that I believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders could relate to is when he spoke about a traumatic event being able to be passed from generation to generation through our genes. If you have the opportunity to read any of his work please do.

Presenting alongside Nadia was a blast. I feel as though the presentation went really well and that we both took

something away from the day. Also Nadia's presentation on the project that she and Lenny have worked tirelessly on for the past 12 months was great. You could really see the effort that went into this work and Nadia's excitement about sharing the findings to an international audience shone through.

Afterwards I had the opportunity to participate in the post-conference tour. It was another awesome way to get to informally engage with everyone, but also to hear more about the Sami culture. On the tour we went to Masi, the hometown of the conference coordinator. Here we heard about how the government had wanted to build a dam but the Sami fought against it and thankfully it wasn't constructed. We also visited the Sami University and the Sami Parliament, a traditional Sami village and made the trip to Northcape, the most northern part of Europe.

Overall, the networks that I have formed by being able to attend this conference have been amazing. The opportunity to present to an international audience the deadly work QATSICPP has done and will continue to do was something that I will cherish.

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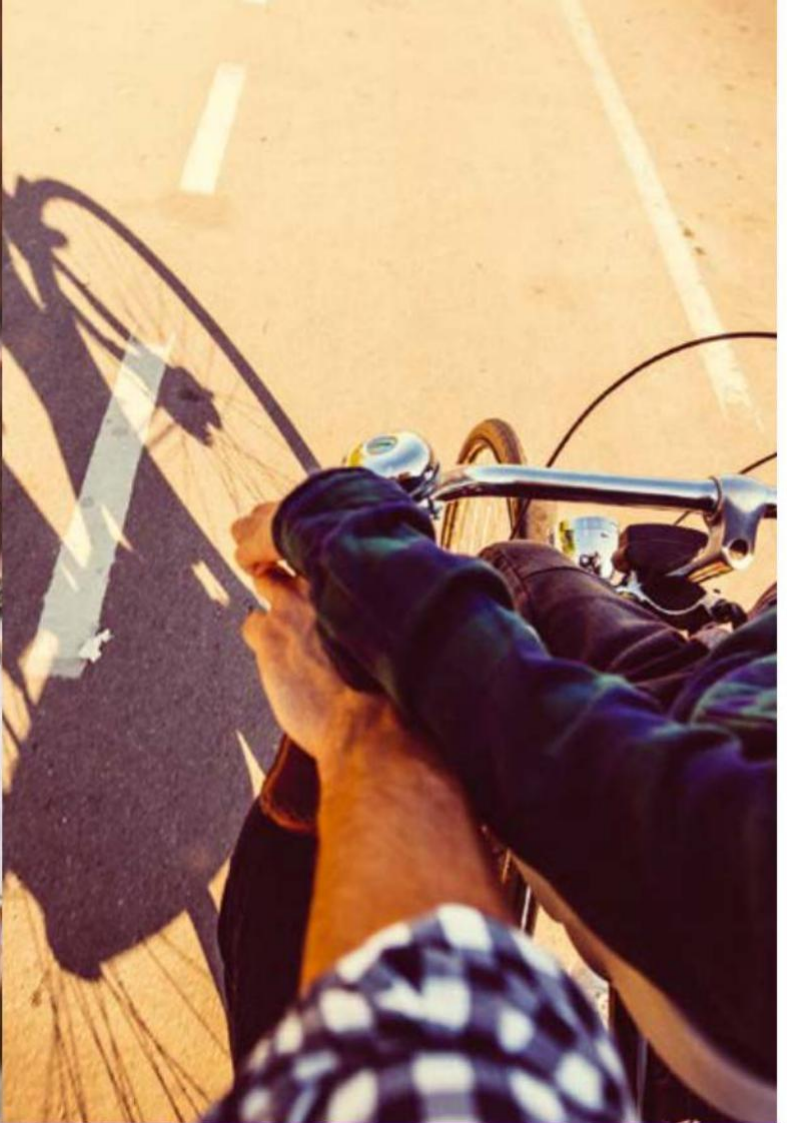


About the author

Candice Butler has been a Senior Practice Leader for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) since September 2015. She has strong family connections to Yarrabah in northern Queensland. Her passion for working with children and families has stemmed from her family and those who she works with and continues to work with on a daily basis.



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ABORIGINAL SOCIAL WORK GRADUATES: WHERE TO NOW?

ELENI P FARIA, SHIRLEY YOUNG, AND AZMIRI MIAN

The social work profession's contribution to Australia's legacy of colonisation, the Stolen Generation and ongoing child welfare interventions, may make entering the profession a contentious issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet the profession is poorer for their absence, and closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous social work graduates is a quest aligned with social justice, and with social work as a human rights profession.

Attracting Indigenous students to social work professions is argued as a response to Indigenous disadvantage. However, this goal is impeded by pervasive racist and exclusionary practices, institutional and discursive practices which valorise White 'expert' knowledge and Eurocentric dominant social work paradigms, according to Gair, Miles, Savage, and Zuchowski (2015) in their article 'Racism unmasked: The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in social work field placements (2015), published in *Australian Social Work*. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that Indigenous social work graduates do not enter social work professions. The South Australian branch of the AASW's Social Justice Committee, as part of Reconciliation Action Plan strategy, has initiated an enquiry to explore potential barriers faced by graduates.

As a requirement of the Master of Social Work, Eleni P Faria undertook a field placement at the South Australian branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers, under the guidance and principal supervision of Azmiri Mian and Shirley Young, and SA Branch Committee Members and part of the Social Justice Group. Utilising primary data input from Indigenous expert advisors, Eleni conducted a cursory literature review, and found structural, cultural and personal barriers preventing Indigenous graduates from entering social work and other professions. There is limited literature pertaining to the Australian context and the review indicates a need for qualitative research, particularly when taking into account international findings that resonate with local Indigenous primary data.

Noted barriers can be broadly categorised as personal vs professional, Indigenous vs organisational cultures, values vs practice and social work education. Here, only a few can be discussed and these include the institutionalised paraprofessional and Vocational Educational and Training (VET) roles, such as Aboriginal consultant, Aboriginal support worker or parent support worker - designed within a prior space of limited or non-qualified Indigenous staff and within a political rationale of cost savings, pragmatism and a dose of essentialist assumptions.

P. T. Giblin in the article 'Effective utilization and evaluation of indigenous health care workers' (1989), notes how First Nations' non-professionals drawn from lower socioeconomic groups, in the U.S. were seen to possess 'the social, environmental and ethnic qualities of a sub-culture [in which] such commonality [was] to foster a positive relationship between the provider and the client. Training of Indigenous health care workers was 'less the acquiring of specific program skills and more the effort to preserve the Indigenous essence of the person'.

This 'essence' was tied to the disenfranchised status of the Indigenous paraprofessional since it was believed that the aide was most useful for 'reflecting the needs, problems and feelings of his own people'. As such, education was seen as a disrupting influence,

'as [the Indigenous person]...acquires more education, he moves into the middle-class and is no longer able to give the same help to persons of lower socio-economic levels (and that) merely working for an agency may distance aides from their communities' (Giblin, 1989).

Such assumptions may signify institutional structural barriers opposing professional pathways for Indigenous graduates. Additionally, there is controversy around Indigenous perceptions of the label 'middle class' and Lahn (2013) argues that the achievement of individual success may threaten the social cohesion of Aboriginal identity, challenging the solidarity rooted in a common experience of disadvantage.

Cultural conflicts with Eurocentric agencies relate the extent to which Indigenous people identify with their communities and cultures. Indigenous people working as cultural brokers mediating between two world views, subsequently experience the tensions of conflicting professional and cultural expectations. The influence of global Indigenous kinship systems entails the ethics of communitarian reciprocity which heavily contrasts with the individualistic focus of mainstream education and practice. Indeed, it is precisely the desire to help one's community which motivates many Indigenous people globally to enter human service professions. However, dominant individualistic approaches, ignorant of Indigenous cultures and disengaged from Indigenous knowledge, result in a conflict that perpetuates and re-enacts the grief and trauma of colonisation.

Research to explore these and other types of barriers faced by Indigenous Australian graduates will further enrich the AASW's commitment to the RAP strategy.

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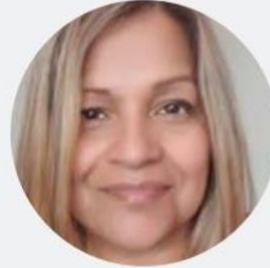
About the authors



Eleni P. Faria is a Master of Social Work student, University of South Australia, and completed her final field placement with the AASW, South Australian Branch. Her primary focus at the AASW was Indigenous social justice research. She is now a member of the Social Justice Committee.



Shirley Young is an Aboriginal woman descending from the Nukunu people. She has a social work degree and for the last 20 years has worked in the public service in a variety of Aboriginal and mainstream positions. The focus of her work has been in the health and welfare sectors.



Azmiri Mian is a Branch Committee Member and Convenor of the Mental Health Practice Group of the AASW South Australian Branch. She supports the branch in relation to the Reconciliation Action Plan. She is on a steering committee working with the SA branch, Flinders University and Reconciliation SA to develop social work students' cultural competency skills when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Azmiri is completing her PhD at the University of South Australia.



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RECLAIMING OUR SAFE WAYS OF PARENTING

HOW TRAUMA RESEARCH IS SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL WAYS OF CHILD REARING

ROWENA LAWRIE AND CAROLYN COUSINS

Rowena Lawrie and Carolyn Cousins look at traditional Aboriginal styles of parenting in the light of Western attachment theory research that validates those practices.

As neurobiological research advances increase our ability to both map the impact of trauma on the brain, as well as help us understand the optimal environment in which children learn and grow, we are seeing a resurgence in the relevance of attachment theory, theories of attunement, and recognition of the importance of emotional warmth in parenting practices.

We are also starting to see neuroscientists argue for the importance of ensuring that children have access to a greater range of emotionally mature and available adults. As Perry and Ludy-Dobson argue in *Working with children to heal interpersonal trauma: The power of play* (2010), humans have not always lived in the way we do now – they highlight that through most of history we have lived in far richer relational environments. In most times, children have been raised in extended family environments, in villages and communities, where, for each child there were more developmentally mature carers who could protect, educate, enrich and nurture children – this is the environment our brains prefer. Perry and Ludy-Dobson regard the nuclear family as one of the worst ‘inventions’ of the 20th century.

Traditional Aboriginal parenting practices are a good example of this richer relational environment. In traditional child rearing practices, there are complex and reciprocal obligations between a greater number of adults, who each take responsibilities in ensuring not only that children are safe, but they are secure and loved. Collective child rearing has not always been valued by Western approaches and Western applications of attachment theory, yet, increasingly, the

research supports collective approaches as a superior way of child rearing.

In the Western model of just a mother and a father, or a single parent, children are incredibly dependent on these adults. If one or both of these people become unavailable for whatever reason, or cause harm, the child or children are at greater risk – risk that can quickly escalate. Aboriginal collective parenting structures protect against this, providing a far greater number of supports and carers to ‘pick up any slack’, as well as educate, nurture and keep children safe.

Aboriginal world views have held child safety and protection at the centre of ‘our’ culture since time began. Aboriginal people invested in the wellbeing of the children, with knowledge that it would be those children who would carry forward the knowledge and practice of culture. In this world view Aboriginal children were visible, loved and deeply valued, and to harm a child in many Aboriginal communities was a grave offence that would attract severe discipline and penalties. Roth observed in 1852, ‘there were very clear criminal sanctions for offending and this was maintained over time. To see a child harmed or unprotected was a very rare phenomenon’.

The authors have been working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health professionals in the NSW health system and NGO sector, who are providing services to Aboriginal children and families, to encourage, promote and validate these ways to families as a source of pride, rather than shame or judgement, in order to reclaim Aboriginal family ways of knowing, being, and doing. One way of achieving this is exploration of these

traditional ways and connecting these with contemporary Aboriginal parenting practices and kinship responsibilities.

We can begin by documenting what we know of Aboriginal child rearing practices pre-invasion, which are shown in Figure 1. This diagram captures just some of the richness, thoughtfulness, supportiveness and protectiveness of Aboriginal child-rearing practices. We would like all communities to embrace these practices, and for Indigenous peoples to reclaim and acknowledge how those practices can be sustained and visible in their communities.

Collective and traditional processes in child rearing encourage attunement through anticipating and planning ahead for children’s needs; the interdependence in responsibility for, and responding too, children’s needs; including practices such as feeding and sleeping on demand; rites of passage through initiation; involvement of a range of adults in teaching and guiding over the life of the child (spiritually, physically and emotionally); breastfeeding (collective); co-sleeping; teaching bush knowledge and life skills; and teachings around puberty and menstruation.

These practices, which are now being recognised as providing more optimal child-rearing environments, were already present in Aboriginal nations prior to invasion. Acknowledging that can go a long way toward promoting pride and acceptance. As our Indigenous colleague at the Education Centre Against Violence, Sigrid Herring has written, ‘we were invaded by a people who had far poorer attachments’.

Judy Atkinson in her paper about trauma-informed services for Indigenous

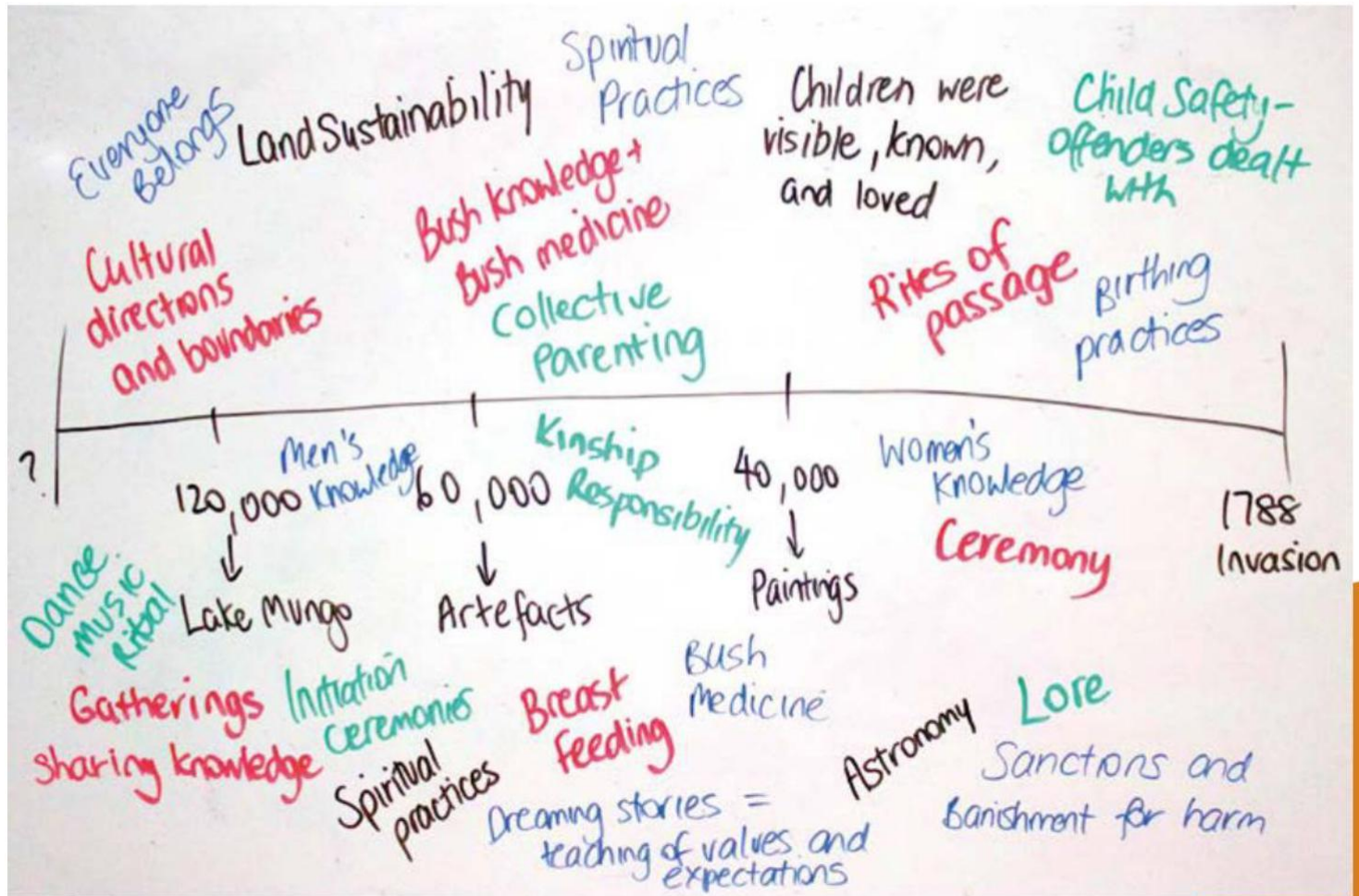


Figure 1: Aboriginal child rearing practices pre-invasion

Australian children talk of how Aboriginal parenting practices can optimise neurological development (see Atkinson, 2013), in particular, for those children who have experienced trauma. New neuronal pathways can be created by Aboriginal cultural practices or learning of those practices, for example, learning Aboriginal languages or singing Aboriginal songs, such as lullabies; learning about the bush and environment and spending time getting to know the environment and country; or learning Aboriginal dance and stories.

As well as embracing and encouraging traditional practices, we need to be cautious in applying Western ways to assessing the appropriateness of parenting, as well as being cautious to not discourage more collective ways. Some recent practices, such as the use of family group

conferencing and prioritising of kinship care placements can assist with this, if implemented well. However, we have a long way to go in truly recognising the value of collective approaches.

Approaches that promote both understanding of traditional ways, and look at ways of incorporating these into current practice, support both the research and a well overdue acknowledgement of the sophistication and child-focused practices that existed in this country pre-invasion. These ways can be included in case planning, to enhance cultural identity care plans, plans that can have meaningful and long-term impacts. This also recognises the importance of working in true collaboration and cohesion with Aboriginal communities and embracing Aboriginal knowledges.

About the authors



Rowena Lawrie and **Carolyn Cousins** are social workers and educators who have been collaborating and modelling as an Aboriginal (Rowena) and non-Aboriginal (Carolyn) pair, working to empower and support culturally appropriate ways of working with Aboriginal communities. Both live and work on Darkungung land on the NSW Central Coast.

MORE THAN A 'TAPESTRY OF FRAGMENTS'

RUTH CROWLEY BROWN

A decade ago I was involved in establishing a domestic violence service in south-west Brisbane, which included targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Although I had worked with many Indigenous people since coming to Australia eight years earlier, and completed several cultural awareness training sessions, setting-up a new service specifically addressing their needs considerably broadened my knowledge base.

In my native London, I had worked providing casework and therapeutic services for minority groups for many years, and was therefore familiar with issues of discrimination and complexity. But reading W. E. H. Stanner's phrase 'the great Australian silence', I felt a flash of recognition. When I moved to west Brisbane, with my Australian husband and young son, I was initially taken-aback by the sea of white faces that greeted us almost everywhere, very different from multicultural north London. This was probably one of the reasons I gravitated towards working in the low socio-economic but more culturally diverse suburb of Inala. But I was most shocked by what seemed a standard reaction to the issue of Indigenous welfare: an 'it has nothing to do with me' response from most people outside the social work profession.

The first priority for the new service was engaging an Indigenous worker. We found a dedicated Wiradjuri woman, and followed her lead in terms of client engagement. Coincidentally, she happened to be married to a local Jagera and Turrbal man (who had grown up in the Inala community, and was now a pastor), and this later turned out to be helpful in building community trust.

I learned that although appropriate signage and artwork both outside and inside the premises was important in signalling a welcoming space, engagement really started within the community. We organised regular visits to the Aboriginal Elders' organisations and Indigenous services to introduce ourselves and communicate our mission statement. These visits were crucial to becoming known as offering an accessible service, and thus generating referrals. I understood how hard it

could be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access mainstream services: where 'polite professionalism' can be experienced as the opposite of 'emotional warmth', and thus alienating.

One day when we visited the sewing circle at the Elders Place, we witnessed the fall-out from an innocuous visit from two Departmental workers (part of their induction), that triggered a traumatic response for a woman who had spent some of her childhood in foster care, and who had recently had her own children temporarily removed.

It took some time for the word about our service to spread through the community, but spread it did, and over the months more and more women attended the centre's weekly 'yarning circle'. At first they noticed small things, which seemed to symbolise big things. For example, I'd bought Dilmah tea and Moccona coffee to show that we valued people by not always buying the cheapest, but they let me know that, well, they just didn't like them. So I stocked up on PG Tips and Nescafe, which was much appreciated.

The group discussions that ensued were some of the most interesting, and profound, that I have experienced. I heard from some of the older women about being raised in Cherbourg, the Aboriginal Community north-west of Brisbane. Some of them had slept for years in dormitories from a very young age (even though their parents might also have been in the camp), and ended up feeling more bonded to their peers than to their parents. And because of their lack of 'being parented' themselves, they felt that it had been extra hard 'to be a mum'; though their experience of being sent out as domestic workers had eventually 'come in handy'. Their sense of humour was second-to-none.



About the author

Ruth Crowley Brown is a social worker, psychotherapist and writer. She has worked in London, England, and Brisbane, Australia, in the fields of child and adolescent mental health, children with disabilities, domestic and family violence, foster care, and with minority groups including refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Some of the younger women described how it wasn't until they were adults that they finally understood the reasons behind their mothers' high level of anxiety and frustration for the seemingly small misdemeanour of coming home a bit late. The legacy of the Stolen Generations runs deep.

Our therapeutic groups included working with women and children, and my colleague had a wealth of cultural material that we incorporated into the work. I was moved by the strength of the culture that has endured. I had assumed, given the legacy of colonisation, that there remained just a 'tapestry of fragments'. But it was more than that.

On my visit to Cherbourg I met a wonderful octogenarian who was curator of the Ration Shed museum. She described waiting in line for hours as a youngster for basic rations of flour, sugar and tea; and said that during that time, never once did she imagine that one day the Shed would be a museum, and she would be its curator. On the walls were displays about the clans that had been forcibly taken there, numbering in excess of 40, and from all over Queensland. These people, she explained, spoke different languages and were from many diverse geographical areas. The old mission had been based on the old English workhouse system, and run like a prison camp; though the real prison island, that filled people with even more dread (they could be sent there for any number of minor transgressions), was many hundreds of miles north, on Palm Island.

The older children's groups (ages 8 to 12), were a wonderful challenge, and self-reports and parental feedback consistently demonstrated positive results. The therapeutic work was a

combination of recognition of negative experiences, and positive psychology. The kids would create a large, collective 'Struggle Street' collage, which was a focal point for action and discussion, and included, for example, practising 'emotion regulation skills'.

The yarning circle women often asked us about services for their men; an uncommon question from DV clients, but unfortunately such dedicated services were also a rarity. Community spirit shone through as daughters- and mothers-in-law despaired together over 'losing' their blokes to alcohol, drugs and prison; but they were determined to stay safe *and* not give up on them. And I also heard about the pros and cons of community relations - there was support, but also obligation: when relatives would (not infrequently) turn up 'out of the blue', the women felt no choice but to be accommodating; and similarly if they had money they felt obliged to 'lend' it out, especially when requested by significant others.

Unfortunately the funding for the service wasn't ultimately renewed. Our clients told us that they were used to short-term funding models, and were stoic. My colleague and I were pretty devastated, not least to be adding to their accumulated sense of feeling let down, yet again, by the system.

I was left with a favourite professional 'compliment'. It happened one day when I was facilitating the yarning circle by myself (my colleague was away at training): a couple of new clients had arrived and were expressing anxiety about safety when one of the women elders stood up and said: 'you're quite safe, we're all black here.'

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