

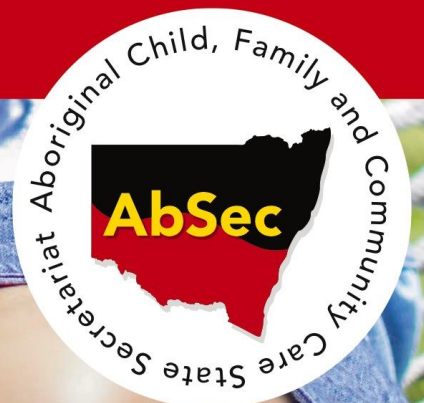


# Caring for Carers

*Recruitment, development and support for carers of Aboriginal children*

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February 2017



Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

## About AbSec

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) is the peak Aboriginal organisation within the child and family sector in NSW. AbSec is committed to advocating on behalf of Aboriginal children, families and communities, to ensure they have access to the services and supports they need to keep Aboriginal children safe and provide them the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential through Aboriginal community controlled organisations.

Central to this vision is the need to develop a holistic approach to Aboriginal child and family supports delivering universal, targeted and tertiary services within communities that cover the entire continuum of care and reflect the broader familial and community context of clients. Such services and supports would operate to mitigate risk factors or vulnerabilities thereby reducing the need for more intensive or invasive interventions, as well as ensuring that tailored and critical Aboriginal out-of-home care and after care services are provided to intervene in the cycle of disadvantage that continue to impact generations of Aboriginal families.

Our vision is that Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, and are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture surrounded by holistic supports.

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
- acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
- underpinning the rights of Aboriginal people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children and families;
- being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
- committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive

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## Introduction

There are currently over 6000 Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW<sup>1</sup>, cared for by their families, extended families, the broader Aboriginal community, and in some cases, non-Aboriginal foster carers. In achieving the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, AbSec is cognisant of the need to provide adequate support to all carers who meet the day-to-day physical, emotional, social, developmental and cultural needs of Aboriginal children and young people, enabling them to provide a solid developmental platform for our children.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a comprehensive carer support model for carers of Aboriginal children and young people across the domains of recruitment, development and support. The goal is to ensure that those doing the important work of growing up our children and young people are provided the necessary training and support to provide culturally embedded therapeutic care.

The development of this model rests on the foundational principles articulated in AbSec's *Achieving a holistic Aboriginal Child and Family Service System for NSW*, including:

1. the importance of relationships in child development, requiring an integrated approach that both addresses the direct needs of children and young people while also strengthening the skills and capabilities of their network of care.
2. that Aboriginal people right to self-determination is critical to effective service provision
3. that culture represents a significant strength in overcoming adversity, and should be central to all efforts to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people and their families.

Self-determination for Aboriginal people refers to the collective right of our communities to design, develop and implement the frameworks to meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

*"Inherent in the right of self-determination is Indigenous decision-making carried through into implementation... The relevant distinction is between a program or policy freely adopted by Indigenous peoples and a program or policy adopted by government about or for Indigenous peoples. The former reflects an exercise of self-determination. The latter does not. To respect the right of self-determination, governments should confine their roles largely to providing financial and other resource support for the implementation of Indigenous programs and policies." Australian Human Rights Commission (1997) Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, pg 276*

AbSec is committed to strengthening Aboriginal families, enabling Aboriginal children and young people to safely remain with or return home to their families. This is the over-arching goal of AbSec's approach to child and family support. However, it is AbSec's firm belief that the safety, welfare and wellbeing of Aboriginal children is paramount, with some children requiring alternate care in the immediate or longer term to protect them from abuse and/or neglect. It is important however that decisions about the welfare of Aboriginal children, and the supports provided to Aboriginal children and their families, are determined by Aboriginal people through Aboriginal-designed and

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<sup>1</sup> AIHW (2016) *Child Protection Australia 2014-15*. Notes 6210 Aboriginal children in care as at 30 June, 2015, however excludes those children placed on third party parental responsibility orders.

implemented frameworks, consistent with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. It is the intention of this paper to outline such a framework for the recruitment, development and support of carers of Aboriginal children and young people.

## Background

This model is a result of AbSec's work to build the capacity and capability of an Aboriginal community controlled child and family sector. This approach, informed by the *Plan on a Page for Aboriginal Children and Young People 2015-2021*, outlines significant long-term reforms needed to transition to an integrated, Aboriginal community controlled child and family system. This plan included steps to enhance the existing Aboriginal sector, including the need for a targeted approach to the recruitment, training and support of foster and kinship carers for Aboriginal children and young people. Specifically, the *Plan on a Page* noted:

*"Establish an Aboriginal targeted approach to foster and kinship care recruitment, development and support state-wide/locally"*

In order to establish such an approach, AbSec commissioned a report that gathered a sample to examine the elements of the existing carer support landscape, identifying those that are working well and areas for improvement, from the perspective of central stakeholders; carers of Aboriginal children and young people and carer support practitioners. This consultation process also included the AbSec Youth Ambassadors, influencing the consultation framework to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal children and young people remained the central focus.

**Recruitment:** The Carer Assessment process was identified as a significant challenge in the recruitment of foster and kinship carers. Acknowledging the need for a high standard of probity to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people being placed in out-of-home care, carers advocated for a consistent, responsive and culturally appropriate assessment process to be developed.

**Development:** The importance of carer development was widely appreciated, including initial and ongoing training and skill building. While general induction training was highly regarded, there was a clear call for greater access to more in-depth training, with a variety of specific training supports available that can be tailored to carer needs (for example, specific training on caring for children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder).

**Support:** A need for a state-wide carer support network was clearly identified, enabling carers to connect with each other and provide peer support. The importance of the carer-caseworker relationship was also acknowledged, with carers seeking greater support to engage important processes such as case planning and cultural support planning processes. For some carers, access to an independent source of information, support and advocacy was considered beneficial on some issues including dispute resolution.

These broad messages, integrated with AbSec's foundational principles, are reflected in AbSec's proposed Carer Support model.

## AbSec's Carer Recruitment, Development and Support Model

### Objectives

An effective Aboriginal carer recruitment, development and support model must meet the following broad objectives:

1. Aboriginal children and young people in need of care and protection can be placed in a safe, culturally embedded therapeutic environment that facilitates important positive relationships and community connections through Aboriginal community controlled organisations
2. That carers of Aboriginal children and young people have access to appropriate and tailored training and development opportunities to enable them to provide quality, culturally embedded therapeutic care delivered by Aboriginal community controlled organisations
3. That those providing care for Aboriginal children and young people receive the supervision and support they need to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the children in their care

### Outcomes

An effective Aboriginal carer recruitment, development and support model must achieve the following outcomes

For carers of Aboriginal children and young people:

- Carers have a more positive experience of recruitment and assessment processes
- Carers report improved access to development opportunities, including timely induction training as well as tailored training packages
- Carers feel informed, supported and valued in their role

For accredited agencies providing case management/sector:

- Decrease in placement breakdowns due to carer-related issues
- Reduction in the occurrence of reportable conduct matters associated with behaviour management and carer stress
- Greater carer engagement in ongoing sector consultation and development
- Improved implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle<sup>2</sup>

For Aboriginal children and young people:

- Greater stability in their placement
- Improved wellbeing through tailored therapeutic care
- Greater connection to their Aboriginal community and culture through improved cultural planning and support

### Scope of Service System

This model is intended to support the recruitment, development and support needs of all carers (kinship and foster) providing care to Aboriginal children and young people. This includes Aboriginal children and young people on permanent legal orders such as guardianship orders (note AbSec's

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<sup>2</sup> See AbSec (2016) *Policy Brief – Aboriginal Child Placement Principle*

position on guardianship and other similar orders), consistent with AbSec’s commitment to the best interests of Aboriginal children regardless of the type of legal order.

## Service Design

This model seeks to build on existing supports and responsibilities, providing greater support and clarity for stakeholders (particularly carers of Aboriginal children, but also practitioners and agencies). It is expected to complement existing supports provided by accredited agencies, supporting stakeholders across the sector to improve service delivery to Aboriginal children and young people. This approach also recognises the needs of different sets of carers, in particular the support needs of kinship carers who may be less able to access informal family supports to assist with their care responsibilities, and are therefore likely to benefit from local support structures.

This model further appreciates the geographic, social and cultural diversity across NSW, and the strengths and challenges associated with “one-size-fits-all” or entirely localised approaches. In an attempt to balance these issues, this model suggests a “hub and spoke” approach, with ten regions suggested based on community cluster, links, geographical location etc.



*Figure 1: Statewide Carer Support provide a "hub" for localised "Caring Communities" across defined regions*

This approach centralises some elements such as resource development, general support (such as the state-wide carer support line) and information management while localising aspects such as ongoing supervision, supported peer networks and training delivery. This model is expected to be most adaptive to the diverse needs of local Aboriginal communities and developing effective relationships with local carers and agencies, while maximising efficiencies from a centralised approach to resource development and information management.

Within this broader design, each level includes different elements and will provide complementary services, resulting in local “Caring Communities” within a supported state-wide network of care.

1. Caring Communities: Localised “Caring Communities” will manage the implementation of local recruitment, development and support activities. Caring Communities will include accredited agencies providing case management of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home

care, recognised Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and local facilitated carer peer networks that are structurally independent of accredited agencies, focused on support and advocacy for carers at the local level. These may be supported by Carer Camps, facilitating carer involvement in ongoing training, support and respite while also facilitating child participation in culturally-embedded activities to improve welfare and wellbeing. Facilitated carer peer networks will also enable direct feedback across the service system, identifying local and state-wide issues facing carers.

2. State-wide network of care: Caring Communities, grouped within ten identified regions (see Fig 1), will form a State-wide network of care, enabling common elements to be shared and delivered more efficiently, and leading to the ability to establish a pool of carers, where needed. This will include the identification of local recruitment needs, resource development and tool development to enable a culturally valid and effective assessment process. Development resources including general and specialised training courses will be centrally developed and delivered through a registered training organisation, ensuring a consistently high quality and recognition of skill development for carers. Information and advocacy services will also be developed centrally for all carers of Aboriginal children (such as the existing State-wide Carer Support Line and AbSec's Growing Stronger Futures Carer Resource and associated Fact Sheets). These services will be further informed by feedback from across the network of Caring Communities, allowing ongoing improvement of existing resources and the development of new tools and resources to support carers of Aboriginal children and young people. The collection and reporting of outcomes associated with the Carer Support Model will be a central responsibility of this centralised core, gathering stakeholder feedback and other data from across Caring Communities, using this data to further improve carer recruitment, development and support. Note that a given region may develop more than one Caring Community or peer network, dependent on the needs of carers in that district, with the key focus being to ensure that support services are accessible for all carers of Aboriginal children and young people.

Local elements	State-wide elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recruitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted recruitment with local ACCOs</li> <li>• Implementation of assessment tools tailored to Aboriginal carers</li> <li>• Feedback on tools to facilitate further development/refinement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training delivery and coordination</li> <li>• Feedback on training delivery and carer needs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated peer support networks (and associated events)</li> <li>• Ongoing supervision (with accredited agency)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recruitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public campaigns and resource development</li> <li>• Pooling carers</li> <li>• Development of assessment processes/tools</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality introductory and specialised training models and resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generic supports (such as carer support line, information services)</li> <li>• Centrally managed peer support network</li> <li>• Annual gathering (including elements of development, support and feedback)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Recruitment and assessment

The recruitment and assessment of carers for Aboriginal children is a critical issue. In too many cases, Aboriginal children and young people are placed beyond family and community, or are forced to move from existing social networks or off Country, undermining important connections. It is essential that approaches to the recruitment of carers for Aboriginal children and young people remains consistent with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principles (including prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection<sup>3</sup>).

To support the full implementation of the ACPP, AbSec proposes a significantly greater role for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) in child protection matters from the earliest opportunity. This includes engaging with ACCOs at the commencement of casework to support family finding efforts and commence required assessments, such that children can be placed within their broader kinship structure should they require to enter care at any point.

It is noted however that non-relative carers for Aboriginal children may still be required, particularly providing emergency, short-term or respite care. This requires the establishment of a pool of potential carers, matched to need across the state, minimising the disruption caused by entry to statutory care as much as possible. Again, Aboriginal community-led approaches are best placed to identify potential Aboriginal carers, drawing on Aboriginal community networks and events. This model proposes specialised local Aboriginal recruitment and assessment, supported by state-wide recruitment resources, campaigns and assessment protocols that are tailored to Aboriginal carers.

Further, in response to sector and carer feedback, tailored assessment processes (including appropriate tools and resources) will be centrally developed by the Aboriginal sector and validated across the state, alongside relevant training in their use. A clear objective will be to establish a state-wide pool of carers that are linked to the Aboriginal Carer Communities network. This is to be achieved through state-wide recruitment, with localised strategies that enable a successful centralised process for managing and assessing carers prior to authorisation at the local level.

Ongoing evaluation processes examining carer recruitment and assessment processes, particularly matched against demand and the ACPP, will be used to drive continuous practice improvement in this area.

## Development

The training and ongoing skill development of carers is a central element of AbSec's approach to carer support. Not only is access to high quality training and development opportunities important to improving the quality of care provided to Aboriginal children and young people, but it also contributes positively to carers feeling valued and supported by the broader care system. Consultations showed that training is highly valued, however that more specialised training opportunities are required. This includes the provision of training tailored to the specific challenges facing Aboriginal children and young people in care (such as trauma-informed practice for carers, behaviour management, or courses on specific issues such as autism or foetal alcohol spectrum disorder), as well as how to best support the cultural needs of Aboriginal children and young people.

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<sup>3</sup> Arney, F., Iannos, M., Chong, A., McDougall, S., & Parkinson, S. (2015). *Enhancing the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Policy and practice considerations* (CFCA Paper No. 34). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia information exchange.

This model proposes the development of specialised training modules attuned to the identified needs of carers of Aboriginal children. These modules will be centrally developed and delivered through a registered training organisation, promoting quality and consistency in training provision while also appropriately valuing the time and commitment of carers and other participants. Delivery through networks of care including multiple accredited agencies will facilitate more timely training while maximising efficiencies. Locally delivered training will also support new carers to integrate with existing carer peer networks and other local supports to increase retention.

## Support

Supervision and support is a standard part of professional care and social service provision, extending beyond monitoring and compliance functions to include support and care as well as ongoing skill development. However, these supervision practices are seldom extended to carers in a structured way, who are otherwise considered “employees” with respect to other behavioural standards<sup>4</sup>. AbSec’s model of carer support then seeks to support and encourage accredited agencies to consider their supervision commitments to carers, and offers additional structures to complement the processes of accredited agencies in delivering quality supervision to carers.

Carers identified the value of carer peer networks where they exist. This model seeks to facilitate the development of local carer peer networks to provide support to carers of Aboriginal children, including a source of advocacy and support that is independent of accredited agencies. This is particularly important in circumstances such as reportable conduct investigations, where carers have significant support needs however their usual support (delivered through agencies) is also associated with the issue about which they need support. Local facilitators of carer peer networks will be able to provide these supports, complemented by the State-wide Carer Support Line and by AbSec.

Further, local accredited agencies will be supported to come together within their regions, or even on a state-wide basis, to deliver support initiatives available to all carers of Aboriginal children and young people. This might include gatherings over a number of days that bring carers together for networking, training opportunities and to discuss local challenges within their Caring Community, while simultaneously offering targeted supports to Aboriginal children and young people in their care (such as culturally embedded social skill development and academic support). Such an approach will strengthen the Caring Communities in which Aboriginal children and young people in care develop, as well as delivering tailored services directly to children and young people themselves.

## Evaluation and monitoring

The ongoing monitoring and review of service delivery and outcomes achieved is a key feature of AbSec’s broader holistic model. AbSec hopes to foster a culture of continuous improvement, building in the routine collection, analysis and dissemination of data to celebrate achievements, identify system flaws and overall improve the efficacy and efficiency of service provision year on year. This collection and reporting of data is also a key element to promote transparency and accountability to Aboriginal communities, building confidence in the service system.

The centralised analysis of this data will further support ongoing processes of innovation and practice improvement, both locally and across the state. In the first instance, local data analysis will empower communities to compare recruitment, development and support activities against previous

<sup>4</sup> That is, carers are considered employees with respect to many legal liabilities (such as reportable conduct processes), although there are many key differences identifying carers as a distinct group.

performance and identified targets, identifying successes and areas for improvement. Performance will also be compared across the state, allowing high performing areas to be examined and lessons shared across the wider carer support network through AbSec, supporting the ongoing development of best practice approaches. Such mechanisms will support innovation through clear evaluation and “competitive tension” within a culture of collaboration and the pursuit of excellence. Recognition of high performance and innovation through AbSec’s sector awards will further incentivise continuous improvement processes.

## Implementation

AbSec’s Carer Recruitment, Development and Support model will be implemented through a staged process, led by AbSec in partnership with accredited agencies in nominated regions. This will commence through regional profiling and a targeted carer engagement strategy in each area, building on what may already be established in each area. A goal of this engagement is to establish, at the local level, identified carer support needs and desired approaches to the carer peer support network. A local facilitator to coordinate and support carers will be identified and engaged to develop and grow a local network and perform the functions as identified in this paper. Initial carer engagement will also establish local baseline measures with respect to carer supports and development over time, gained through available data and established survey measures conducted by AbSec.

Establishment of carer peer support networks will also be supported by key staff within AbSec attending carer peer network gatherings. This will support the development of pathways for two-way communication between Caring Communities and State-wide supports, and the tailoring of resources to the needs of communities. Carer peer networks will be partially attended by carer support workers, to open direct communication between carers collectively and accredited agencies. Carer peer networks will then build their capacity to meet the needs of carers in their area, as well as growing their engagement with carers, including:

- Advocacy/support/supervision (including emotional support and reflection to support wellbeing and effective service delivery)
- Cultural understanding
- Training and development needs and opportunities
- Information sharing and experiences
- Service/sector updates and emerging issues.

Detailed implementation planning, following identification of resource investment, will be undertaken to establish the model, and integrate it within the sector. Preliminary cost implications are also to be developed based on provision of local and state-wide support structures, and operationalising elements of the approach.