

Ngulluk Moort, Ngulluk Boodja, Ngulluk Wirin (Our Family Our Country Our Spirit) Out-Of-Home Care Study: Cultural Connection Index for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Living in Out-of-Home Care

Sharynne Hamilton, Aunty Charmaine Pell, Aunty Millie Penny, Larissa Jones, Carol Michie, Alison Walton-Blane

The Ngulluk Moort, Ngulluk Boodja, Ngulluk Wirin research team, led by the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort Child Protection Elders and expert knowledge holders, Aunty Millie Penny and Aunty Charmaine Pell, is working with stakeholders in the non-Indigenous foster care sector in Perth looking after Aboriginal children from across Western Australia. Ensuring connection to kin, culture and community is central to the work of the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort Elder Co-researchers who have provided cultural guidance and advice for almost a decade to our research.

For Aboriginal children living away from their families in non-Aboriginal foster care, cultural planning is crucial for supporting and maintaining connections to kin, family and community, Country, language, cultural activity, and for receiving and passing on cultural knowledge to our future generations. The amount, type and quality of information about children and their families is important for cultural support plans to be beneficial. As such, it is important to consider where and how cultural information is sought, and to guarantee it is collected collaboratively with Elders and Aboriginal family and community members, that are specific to a child's kin and community. There is extensive lived experience, knowledge and information in these networks that can assist bolstering cultural plans for our kids.

We have long advocated the recovery needs of Aboriginal children and young people involved with the justice and child protection systems. Recovery in the context of justice and child protection involves redressing the harm from the policies of forced removal from kin, country and culture. Harms that continue to reverberate consequences across our communities. As it stands, the long-term health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are poor, with youth detention and adult prisons an inevitable trajectory for many. Culture is key to turning this trajectory around. Cultural connections can assist to mitigate the effects of trauma and recognise the healing value of inclusion and connection with culture. In 2020, we explored with the Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort Elder Co-researchers, personal justice capital assets for children living away from their families in non-Indigenous foster care and involved with the child justice system, as a way of measuring their cultural connections and the aspects of culture that can assist their long-term health and wellbeing, and developed the Justice Capital Assets Scale. After our first collection of cultural information with the agency staff and carers we reviewed the results, and it was evident that there were various aspects of this Justice Capital Assets Scale that did not accurately reflect the cultural assets of children in out-of-home care, for example very young children and children not involved with the justice system. Further, we recognised there was a lack of understanding of some terminology, and wide interpretations of the statements.

We conducted an Elder-led redesign of the Justice Capital Assets Scale with our advisory group members and Aboriginal staff from our partner agencies and have developed a Cultural Connection Index for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children Living in Out-of-Home Care. The Cultural Connection Index is strength-based and designed for self-assessment, or for assessment by social and support workers seeking to bolster the cultural elements of a child or young person's life. Low scores provide information about the gaps that need to be explored and addressed to ensure that any Aboriginal child or young person living away from their families are connected to their kin, culture, country and community. The higher the score, the greater the chance of better long-term health and wellbeing outcomes. Knowledge about cultural assets and resources such as that which can be collected using the Cultural Connection Index, are best supported when practices involve placing Elders and Aboriginal community members at the centre of everything they do. Institutions that provide forums for information sharing and decision-making; that facilitate possibilities for cultural connections, cultural activity and resources and that provide access to information about a range of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations can support children, young people and their communities to flourish.

Ngulluk Moort, Ngulluk Boodja, Ngulluk Wirin (Our Family Our Country Our Spirit) Out-of-Home Care Study

Cultural Connection Index for Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Children living in out-of-home care

5. Strongly Agree, 4. Agree, 3. Sometimes, 2. Disagree, 1. Strongly Disagree

1. ____ I regularly see an Aboriginal person that I trust.
(Aboriginal Elder, kin, family or community member that the child has regular contact with)
2. ____ I have a cultural mentor that I trust.
(Regular contact with a trusted, professional Aboriginal person)
3. ____ I have cultural peer support to help me reach my goals.
(Aboriginal person: early childhood/playgroup support, education support, goal setting or career support)
4. ____ I have Mob that takes me out on Country.
(Mob = Aboriginal person/people and on Country = where the child is living i.e., camping; to the beach; on bushwalks; picnics; hunting; fishing)
5. ____ I go back to Country to visit my Mob.
(Back to Country = the child's traditional lands and community; My Mob = my family)
6. ____ I have a regular formal contact arrangement with one of my parents.
7. ____ I have a regular formal contact arrangement contact with my siblings.
8. ____ I play in a sporting team with Mob.
(Aboriginal sporting team; team with other Aboriginal children)
9. ____ My Elders tell me cultural stories and share cultural knowledge with me.
10. ____ I read cultural stories or cultural stories are read to me.
11. ____ I can listen to or watch cultural stories using a media device (e.g., audio device, television, phone, computer or tablet).
12. ____ I go to cultural ceremonies.
(Cultural ceremonies can look different across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups: Sorry business, funerals, smoking ceremonies, birthing ceremonies, baby naming ceremonies)
13. ____ I do art with Mob.
14. ____ I do cultural dancing with Mob.
15. ____ I learn and speak an Aboriginal language.
16. ____ I can get resources I need for cultural activity.
(Finances, transport, willing carers)
17. ____ I spend time with an Aboriginal carer.
(Full-time carer/respice carer)
18. ____ My carer takes me out on Country.
(Camping; to the beach; on bushwalks; picnics where the child lives)
19. ____ I go to an Aboriginal Medical Service.
(Community-controlled services providing holistic, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate healthcare to Aboriginal community members)
20. ____ I go to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.
(Organisations that are governed, controlled and delivered by Aboriginal community members)

Possible Maximum Score: 100 My Score: ____