



Australian Foster Care Association

Policy and Position Statement

on

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Care

2005

For Foster, Relative and
Kinship Care Across Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care

Position:

AFCA recognises SNAICC as the National body responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care and is committed to working with and supporting SNAICC in the raising of issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and children and young people in the care system. AFCA believes that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, including relatives, should be provided with the same level of training, and financial and non-financial support as other carers. Wherever possible, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people needing a placement must be placed within their own community.

Commentary:

The Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) membership consists of representatives of the recognised Foster Care Associations of each State and Territory. The above statement represents the position of AFCA as at 1 January 2005. This is not meant to be an exhaustive statement, but rather covers the major issues raised by foster carers in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care. The statement has been produced to encourage:

- Quality outcomes for children and young people in care;
- Satisfying partnerships between foster carers, Indigenous carers and workers; and
- Consistency across the nation.

Definition:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are over-represented in the care system throughout the country. This situation requires both urgent attention and special culturally appropriate programs to address the particular issues faced by this group.

Acknowledgements:

1. The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the care system is unacceptable but addressing this must not leave children in abusive situations.
2. The current problems faced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the responsibility of us all.
3. Early intervention and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is crucial.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers need to be assessed with recognition of their cultural practices and within their community norms and boundaries.
5. Notwithstanding that abuse can occur in any community, no child should endure abuse within those cultural norms. Every child has a right to be safe and secure.
6. Despite every best effort to place an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, some children and young people may not be able to be placed with appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers. Non-Indigenous foster carers should complete a cultural orientation program.
7. Aboriginal children can move around within their family often and this can lead to more damage/trauma.

Issues:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers require training, assessment and supports that are culturally sensitive, culturally appropriate, and recognise the life experiences and community practices of the people.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers need to be recruited, trained, assessed and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, agencies or community councils. They should have an assigned worker to maintain contact and supervision of placement, to provide support to both carer and child/young person, and to help in meeting standards of care.
3. Financial and non-financial support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers should be the same as that afforded to other foster carers.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers will commonly be relatives of the children and young people placed with them and this in itself requires special support and understanding
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers should be included in the decision-making regarding placement and movement of children and young people in the care system.

6. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle should be strictly adhered to but if such a placement is not possible or leaves the child exposed to those who abused the child, then a sensitive alternate placement should occur.
7. National genealogical tracking should be part of standard casework for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care.
8. There needs to be recognition that issues facing remote, rural, urban and traditional people are very different, requiring different solutions, programs, sensitivities.
9. Children in care should be supported to gain cultural knowledge and experience their culture.
10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers need to be provided with opportunities to attend training and discussion forums within their State and nationally to exchange ideas and experiences, to gain support from other carers.
11. Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers need to be supported to gain cultural knowledge and have access to appropriate training and cultural support structures.