

Sharing messages

A video and learning package for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Decision Making Program (AFDM)



learning family
sharing messages
decision making
Aboriginal program
video
Torres Strait Islander

Sharing messages

A video and learning package for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Family Decision Making Program (AFDM)

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Published by The Office for Children, Child Protection and Family Services Branch
Victorian Government Department of Human Services Melbourne Victoria Australia
November 2005

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Also published on <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/indigenousinitiatives>

Authorised by the Victorian Government, 555 Collins St, Melbourne

Printed by Big Print Pty Ltd, 520 Collins St. Melbourne

Acknowledgements

This learning package was developed by the Department of Human Services with input from many wonderful people.

- Aboriginal Family Decision Making Steering Group
- Richard Frankland, John Foss, John Staley of Golden Seahorse Productions
- Our Elders, for their love, strength, guidance and wisdom, it is with the utmost respect to Aunty Irene Thomas, Aunty Fay Carter, and Aunty Georgina Williams
- Management and staff at Koori Heritage Trust
- Actors, Lisa Maza, Aaron Pedersen, Brendan Murray, Jada Milroy, Aunty Christine Saunders, Kyle Atkinson.

It is with the utmost respect to Aunty Irene Thomas, Aunty Fay Carter, and Aunty Georgina Williams. Our Elders, for their love, strength, guidance and wisdom.

Foreword

I am deeply honoured to have been asked to write the introduction to the Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program Learning package.

I have written and directed many films; some of them naturally have more meaning to me than others. The Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program DVD is one of these. The reasons for this are outlined below.

As every Indigenous person in Australia, my family and many of my friends have been touched by negative government policy. The outcomes of these policies have meant the destruction of many Aboriginal families, tribal social structures and the imposition of a foreign social structure that has had negative repercussions for Indigenous Australia. One example is the historical practice of removing Indigenous children from their families, culture and traditional lands which resulted in a contemporary trans generational trauma, which is evident today in so many negative ways.

As we look about in current times, the negative statistics are still overwhelming. The issues that we face as a people are intimidating and in many instances soul destroying.

The AFDM program facilitates an initiative and attitude that I hope echoes across all Government Departments and also across broader society. In my opinion the AFDM program encompasses a recognition of Indigenous culture and cultural practices as well as the social circumstances that many Indigenous people face. It does this by treating Indigenous families as stakeholders who are facing complex social and cultural problems, not as the problem. The program also recognizes Indigenous family structures, assists in the recognition and reinstatement of Elders and their status within family, community and tribe or nation. The manner in which the program operates also creates opportunity for Non-Indigenous staff to learn about Indigenous people and the problems that we face on a local and intimate level, subsequently many of the derogatory myths and negative attitudes that abound about Indigenous Australia are dispelled and families can be seen as individual family units within the Indigenous cultural shape. In short the program humanizes what has been for far too long de humanizes by broader societal attitude, the Indigenous people of Australia.

The unique and inclusive nature of the program itself dictated the process in which we should make the DVD. The staff involved, Tammy, Wendy, Natasha, Jeannie, Prue, Mike and many others were so passionate that the only way to make the DVD was to make it with them as participants. So DHS staff became writers, actors, gaffas, grips, caterers, continuity persons and producers.

As are most films it was hard work. The end result is a DVD, which is not only a learning tool but also documentation of a program that I hope to see as a template for a long overdue healing process between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous for Australia.



Richard Frankland

Writer/Director

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Facilitator's notes

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family
Decision Making Program learning package**

What is 'Sharing messages' about?

This material is designed to assist in sharing messages about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Family Decision Making (AFDM) program involving Elders, Department of Human Services Child Protection AFDM convenors, Community AFDM convenors, Child Protection workers and families. The learning package contains a video/DVD 'Sharing messages', facilitator's notes to accompany the video/DVD and session notes for Elders and joint sessions. One session is to be facilitated with Elders interested or currently involved in the program (a two-hour session) and another is designed for Elders, Community convenors and Child Protection convenors (a three-hour joint session).

This material is designed to be used in local areas, primarily for Elders, Community convenors, Department of Human Services Child Protection convenors and Child Protection workers to learn about AFDM and share messages about the program with one another.

This material covers the key messages in relation to AFDM while also allowing for regional variation and local area information to be included.

Package contents:

- Video/DVD – 'Sharing messages'
- Facilitator notes to accompany the Sharing messages video/DVD
- Photos of family members in the Sharing messages video/DVD
- Session outline and notes for facilitators for two-hour Elders session
- Session outline and notes for facilitators for three-hour joint session for Elders, Community convenor and Department of Human Services convenor
- Evaluation forms for each of the sessions.
- AFDM – key messages
- Protocol between Department of Human Services Child Protection and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- Aboriginal Child Placement Principle guide
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Support Plan and guide
- Message Stick Model – overview

Elders Session – Sharing messages about AFDM

Example: The session outline provided is an example. It is recognised that sessions will be developed to suit your region.

Session outline

Time	Session component	Time allowance	Resources and comments
10.00 am	Arrival	30 minutes	Tea/coffee
10.30 am	Welcome to Country and welcome by facilitator	15 minutes	Where possible, Welcome to country by an Elder or appropriate person from local clan group
10.45 am	Introduction to the session and introduction to the video/DVD	30 minutes	'Sharing messages' video/DVD – Facilitators notes
11.15 am	MORNING TEA	15 minutes	Morning tea provisions
11.30 am	Video/DVD – (Part B) The interviews	30 minutes	'Sharing messages' – The interviews
12.00 noon	Discussion – the video/DVD, the day, questions/comments etc.	30 minutes	Information packs
12.30 pm	LUNCH	As required	Lunch provisions

Tips for facilitator

You may need to build into the session some time to discuss with participants words that families may use. It should also be discussed that Aboriginal families across Victoria will use various terms. Encourage participants within the group who may be able to share their knowledge about this. It is also important that acknowledgement of families who come from Torres Strait Islands or other states will also use different language terms.

Also note that prior to screening the family meeting for participants, it is important to inform the group that the family portrayed in the DVD are actors and their story is fictional and not based on any real family's situation. It is sometimes good to clarify that the group may see aspects of the family that seem familiar; however, this is not because it is a real family, rather that critical issues facing families involved with Child Protection have been written into the detail of this family, for example, drug and alcohol issues and family violence, in order to make the situation as realistic as possible.

Arrival, Welcome to Country and welcome by facilitator – facilitator notes

The facilitator should consider the choice of venue, being mindful of participants' needs, for example, access to the building, close to public transport (unless other travel arrangements are made) and sensitivity, that is, know the history of the building you are in and how this is perceived by Aboriginal people.

On arrival, the facilitator will greet all Elders and ensure that they are aware of the facilities, such as coffee/tea, toilets etc. The facilitator should provide nametags for the Elders if you feel it's appropriate (in some regions this will not be necessary as people will know each other well).

It may be a good idea to also set up the room in a boomerang shape or in a talking circle to encourage discussions.

The facilitator will also arrange a Welcome to Country, an Elder where possible, or appropriate person of a local clan group. The person opening the day may be the manager overseeing the program in the region, or the CEO of the agency as part of partnership for AFDM in the region.

Introduction to the day and introduction to the video/DVD

The facilitator will outline the program for the day, referring the Elders to the programs provided, and encouraging questions and comments. The facilitator needs to be prepared to address any and all questions, and to be flexible with the agenda, as the Elders may want to ask/discuss lots of issues and this should be encouraged and supported.

The facilitator will then introduce the video/DVD (refer to 'Sharing messages' video/DVD – Facilitators notes) and introduce the interviews.

Sharing messages – The interviews

The facilitator will screen the three interviews. These can be shown one after another in sequence, or one at a time stopping for discussion after each.

Discussion – the video/DVD, the day, questions/comments

The facilitator then opens up the discussion about the interviews and facilitates questions and discussion regarding any aspect of the interviews, the day, and the AFDM program.

It is important at this time to provide the Elders with an information kit in relation to Child Protection, the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) and any local service information as appropriate. This could include information about Indigenous family violence workers, local services, agency phone numbers and so on.

This is a time for Elders to receive information about AFDM and about other services and supports available within their community. If, at this time, the Elders indicate an interest in becoming part of the AFDM program in the region, it is important to let them know when the joint sessions will be occurring (the Elders, Community convenors and Department of Human Services convenors Sharing messages session) and provide local information as to how the Elders would become part of the AFDM program in the region.

Elders, Community convenors and Child Protection AFDM convenors

Example: The session outline provided is an example. It is recognised that sessions will be developed to suit your region.

Session outline

Time	Session component	Time allowance	Resources and comments
9.00 am	Arrival	30 minutes	Tea/coffee
9.30 am	Welcome to Country and welcome by facilitator	15 minutes	
9.45 am	Introduction – Discussion – Participants identify what they want from session	15 minutes	
10.15 am	MORNING TEA	15 minutes	Morning tea provisions
10.30 am	Introduction to the video/DVD 'Sharing messages'	15 minutes	'Sharing messages' video/DVD – Facilitators notes
10.45 am	Video/DVD – Part A (the family meeting) and Discussion	60 minutes	'Sharing messages' – The family meeting
11.45 am	Video/DVD – Part B (the interviews)	30 minutes	'Sharing messages' – The interviews
12.15 pm	Discussion – the video/DVD, the day, questions/comments etc.	15 minutes	
12.30 pm	LUNCH	As required	Lunch provisions

Arrival, Welcome to Country and welcome by facilitator – facilitator notes

On arrival, the facilitator to greet all Elders, Community convenors and Child Protection convenors and ensure that they are aware of the facilities, such as coffee/tea, toilets. The facilitator will provide nametags for all participants if appropriate (in some regions this will not be necessary as people will know each other well).

It may be a good idea to set up the room in a boomerang shape or talking circle to encourage discussions.

The facilitator also arranges a Welcome to Country, where possible, and arranges for an appropriate person to open the day.

The person opening the day may be the manager overseeing the program in the region, or the CEO of the agency in partnership for the AFDM in the region–this is up to you.

Introduction to the day and introduction of Child Protection and AFDM

The facilitator will then outline the program for the day, referring everyone to the programs provided, and will also encourage questions and comments. The facilitator will need to be prepared to address any and all questions, and be prepared to be flexible with the agenda, as the participants may want to ask/discuss lots of issues and this should be encouraged and supported.

The facilitator will then provide some information in relation to:

- the role of Child Protection, including intake, investigation, risk assessment, substantiation of child abuse and neglect and Children's Court orders
- Child Protection protocol with VACCA.

This information could be provided in the form of a discussion or a case example while writing up on the whiteboard the flow of a case through the Child Protection system and the role of the ACSASS program.

The facilitator will then show the PowerPoint presentation – AFDM, which provides an outline of the AFDM, context, history and aims (key messages).

Introduction to the video/DVD – 'Sharing messages' – The family meeting

The facilitator will then refer to 'Sharing messages' video/DVD facilitators notes, introduce the video/DVD and screen the family meeting.

The facilitator can either screen the whole meeting then discuss with the group encouraging comments, feedback and questions, or the meeting can be screened in three parts, allowing for discussion of the different parts of the meeting.

The video/DVD – ‘Sharing messages’ – The interviews

The facilitator will then refer to the video/DVD facilitators notes, and introduce the interviews. Again, these can be shown one at a time, or as a group, with discussion following.

Discussion, the video/DVD, the day, questions, comments

The facilitator will then open up the discussion about the family meeting and interviews seen, and facilitate questions and discussion regarding any aspect of the family meeting, interviews, the day, the AFDM program and sharing messages with each other.

It is important at this time to provide the participants with an information kit in relation to Child Protection, the ACSASS program, and any local service information as appropriate. This could include information about Indigenous Family Violence workers, local services, agency phone numbers.

Note: If this session is to be run with a large group of Elders, Community convenors and Department of Human Services convenors, it would be appropriate to ask the participants to move into groups of Elders, Community convenors and Department of Human Services convenors, and ask them to discuss the AFDM program, the video/DVD, and what they have covered today; and also to share with one another what they see as the benefits and challenges of the program. Then ask each group to feedback to the larger group.

Sharing messages

Session notes

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family
Decision Making Program learning package**

Tips for the facilitator

The above is detailed information and context in relation to this family. It is important to provide the group with some of this information, but not all of it, before they view the family meeting. In particular, you need to cover the following:

- history of Child Protection involvement
- current notification to Child Protection
- other relevant information use of language to describe drug use, eg. 'yarndi'

Introducing ‘Sharing messages’

The Sharing messages video/DVD provides detailed information about organising and running an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Family Decision Making (AFDM) meeting. It also includes interviews with an Elder, Department of Human Services, Child Protection unit manager, Rumbalara Youth & Family Services manager, and those who developed the Message Stick Model.

The video/DVD was produced by Golden Seahorse Productions in conjunction with the Indigenous Initiatives Unit and the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Professional Development Unit.

The video/DVD is in two parts:

- **Part A** – The family meeting
- **Part B** – The interviews

Part A: The family meeting

The following is background information about the family that is portrayed in the family meeting. Those in red are present in the video/DVD.

Family members:

Jyda Lee	18 months old, son of Allira and Peter
Marni Lee	7 years old, daughter of Allira and Peter
Michael Campbell	14 years old, son of Allira and John
Allira	Mother of Michael, Marni and Jyda
Peter Lee	Father of Jyda and Marni
John Campbell	Father of Michael (in jail)
Ted Campbell	Brother to John
Sarah Campbell	Grandmother to Michael and mother of John
Margaret	Grandmother to Jyda, Marni and Michael and mother of Allira
William	Grandfather to Jyda, Marni and Michael and father of Allira
Karinya	Aunt to Jyda, Marni and Michael and Allira's sister
Alistair	Uncle to Jyda, Marni, Michael (Karinya's Husband)
Mark	Cousin to Jyda, Marni, Michael (son of Karinya, Alistair)
Tracey	Cousin to Jyda, Marni, Michael (Daughter of Karinya, Alistair)

Professionals:

AFDM Community convenor	Tammy Lovett
Child Protection convenor	Prue Blackmore
Elder	Aunty Irene Thomas
ACSASS worker	Sylvia Choate
Child Protection worker	Brenda Ford
Juvenile Justice worker	Helen Archibald
Maternal and Child Health Nurse (for Jyda)	
Koori Educator (for Marni)	

Genogram

A genogram of the family is attached as appendix 1, however, it is recommended that the photographs of family members provided be used instead to outline the connections between family members.

History of Child Protection involvement

Child Protection has been involved with Allira and her former partner, John Campbell. Allira met John when she was 17 years old and soon after became pregnant with her first child, Michael, now 14 years old. Allira experienced violence and used drugs while in the relationship with John. Allira had a daughter who died at birth as a result of an assault by John. This incident lead to Child Protection being notified, and police involvement. John received a jail sentence for the assault and, with the support of her family and Child Protection, Allira left John taking Michael with her and Child Protection closed the case. As a result of this incident, Allira and Michael have no contact with John's side of the family, despite both Sarah and Ted being a potentially very positive influence and support for the family. John has been back and forward to prison since this time, as a result of various drug and assault charges. He has no contact with Allira or Michael and is currently serving a long sentence in prison.

Current notification to Child Protection

Child Protection has received a notification in relation to the three children: Michael (14 years old), and his younger siblings Marni (seven years old) and Jyda (18 months).

The protective concerns relate to significant alcohol and drug use in the family home and family violence between Allira and Peter Lee. There are also concerns that the three children are often not in their parents' care, and Michael's risk taking and offending behaviour has escalated lately. Michael is not attending school regularly, he is smoking a lot of yarndi (marijuana), is suspected by the police of being involved in some thefts in the area, and disappears for days at a time. The Koori Juvenile Justice worker has become involved with Michael. Koori Juvenile Justice offers an early intervention and prevention program, and were referred by the police following a series of warnings regarding Michael's offending behaviour.

The local maternal and child health nurse has made a number of appointments with Allira to take Jyda for his check up. Allira does not show up to the appointments and the Koori support worker of the medical clinic is concerned about this. Furthermore, Marni is missing a lot of school, and has told the teachers that she has been looking after her baby brother when her mother and father 'are sleeping'. Concerns have also been raised about the state of the house, that is, the family never has any money or food and the house always 'smells unclean'.

The children's Aunt Karinya and her husband Alistair have spoken to Margaret and William about the situation and decided to notify Child Protection. Marni and Jyda stay with Karinya for long lengths of time and Michael sometimes stays with Karinya and Alistair but is usually out with cousins and will stay with other family members. Michael sometimes does stay at home, but usually when this happens Peter is 'on his back all the time'.

Karinya and Alistair have always offered to have the kids over at their place, it has now got to the stage where Allira will leave the children with Karinya and Alistair and not leave any money for them, and will only leave one change of clothing for over the weekend. Allira tells Karinya it is only for the weekend, but Allira will not come back for them until later in the week and sometimes Allira will call and check on the kids, but not always.

Karinya believes that Allira does not come back to pick up the kids because Allira and Peter are probably having had a fight. Peter has a lot of people coming and going at the house and at weekends they have big mobs visit and they drink and smoke yarndi.

Karinya knows Peter has hurt Allira over the weekend, and says that this has been a pattern over the past three months. Karinya is sure that Allira doesn't pick the kids up on Sunday night because she is waiting for a black eye to fade or is too sore to move after being hit. Karinya said that Allira knows she knows what is going on. However, Allira doesn't say anything to Karinya about Peter assaulting her because the last time she did, Karinya told Peter he was a junkie and he lived off his own kids and their money for his drug habit. Peter hit Allira and told Karinya to mind her own 'f-ing business'. This led to the children not seeing Karinya and Alistair for about a month. Therefore, Karinya has not said anything for fear of not being able to care for the children, and her concerns that Allira will leave them with other fellas who are drinking and smoking all the time.

Child Protection has conducted an initial investigation jointly with the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS), and the protective concerns raised in the notification have been substantiated. A referral has been made to the AFDM program to develop a safety and wellbeing plan to address the protective concerns for the children.

Other relevant information

Peter Lee has no contact with his family and very little is known about them. He was placed in various children's homes as a child, and then in a number of different non-Aboriginal foster care placements before he turned 16 years and was discharged from care.

John Campbell and his older brother Ted have lived in the city all their life. John and Ted's mother Sarah was taken from her family when she was about two years old and brought up with a non-Aboriginal family and never saw her parents again. As a young girl Sarah worked in a wool factory during the day and sometimes did domestic duties for a wealthy suburban family in the evenings. Sarah came from a large family of nine children.

Sarah is well connected to community in Melbourne, is involved in a local church group, and helps with young people. Sarah is keen to have a relationship with Allira and the children, but is aware that all of Allira's family might still be very angry with them as a result of John's assault on Allira and the subsequent death of her second child. Sarah, however, is still keen to connect with the children and Allira and offer any support she can, as is her son Ted. Ted and his wife and children do not have a lot to do with the Aboriginal community.

Margaret and William live in rural NSW and have strong ties to their country and traditional ancestry. They both have a very strong knowledge base of where their people come from and the connections of family relations. Margaret and William are supportive of both their daughters, but are not able to offer direct assistance to Allira and the children as they live many miles away, and find it hard to make the trip using public transport. Allira moved to the city a few years after her older sister Karinya had moved to the city to work in Aboriginal Affairs.

Background to referral

On receiving the notification, Child Protection and ACSASS workers have conducted their investigation with the family. Both Allira and Peter talked about it being hard to provide for the three children when they are both on the pension. They denied using drugs and alcohol to the extent alleged in the notification but said they would like to do something about their use, and would be happy to talk to a counsellor. Allira and Peter also talked about finding it hard to make ends meet on the pension and admitted they often struggle to have enough food for the family. In relation to Michael, both Allira and Peter think that his behaviour is just a stage he's going through and that he's old enough to look after himself, but when Peter left the room, Allira admitted that she thinks Michael is struggling without having his father in his life, and that Peter and Michael don't get on well together. Allira and Peter denied any significant violence in their family, however, Allira appeared to have some faded bruising on her face. All three children are currently in the care of their Aunt Karinya, and the Child Protection worker and the ACSASS worker have suggested an AFDM meeting to come up with a plan to address the concerns and ensure the children's safety and wellbeing. The family has agreed to go ahead.

A referral was made to AFDM convenors.

AFDM meeting issues

Child Protection bottom lines:

Any plan that the family comes up with in the meeting needs to address these issues. If a plan cannot be developed that achieves this and addresses the safety and wellbeing of each child, then further intervention by Child Protection may be required, such as a Protection Application to the Children's Court.

- The plan must ensure the safety and wellbeing of all the children.
- The plan must address the drug and alcohol issues of the parents and the family violence.
- The plan must address Michael's risk taking behaviour.
- The plan must address both Jyda's maternal and child health needs, and Marni's educational needs.

Family members:

- Peter feels very alone; he knows very little about his family and has few connections to community. Peter gets very angry during the meeting and believes that everyone is making it bigger than it really is. He is also very angry about Child Protection and Juvenile Justice involvement with his children, and very worried about this, given his own involvement with welfare years before.
- Allira is alternating between supporting Peter and wanting to listen to her family who were so supportive in the past when things went wrong with John. She wants to do what's right but, like Peter, is struggling with her alcohol and substance misuse.
- Karinya and Alistair are keen to do whatever they can to keep the children safe and well, but also support Allira and see her life change. Karinya and Alistair are also keen to build a relationship with Sarah and Ted and think Ted is a strong uncle who would provide good support to Michael.
- Margaret and William are very worried about Allira and the children, and want to do whatever they can to assist them, just as they were able to when John was involved with Allira.
- Ted and Sarah are keen to connect back with the family and offer what support they can, however there is still some bad feeling about how they were treated when John killed the baby. So they have some mixed feelings toward the family, but are committed to helping John's son Michael in particular.
- Michael is angry at everyone and just wants to do his own thing.
- John was contacted as a part of the Child Protection involvement, but told workers to stay out of his life, not to contact him again, and that he wanted nothing to do with his son Michael.

Preparation for family meeting

- Key messages for convenors (see key messages document).
- Both convenors organised a time to meet and discuss referrals with the Child Protection caseworker, Child Protection team leader and ACSASS worker.
- The two convenors and the Elder arranged a time to meet with the immediate family.
- Both convenors made it a priority to have the right information, find out as much as possible about the family and the protective concerns.
- Organise a pre-family meeting with support services to find out who is already involved with the family and to discuss what is already in place for the child/ren, young person and family.

Other professionals involved

The adults at this stage have not engaged with services.

- Maternal and child health nurse – for Jyda
- Koori educator – for Marni

Screen the video

Resolution: development of safety plan

- Both Allira and Peter have agreed to talk with a counsellor about the violence in their relationship.
- Peter and Allira have agreed to meet and start working with a drug and alcohol worker about their substance use.
- Karinya and Alistair will have all the children every second weekend, and Michael agrees to go to Margaret and William one weekend every two months.
- Allira will work with the maternal and child health nurse in relation to Jyda's check-ups.
- The family agree to Sarah and Ted having more contact and involvement with Michael. This will start with Sarah and Margaret having regular contact.
- In an emergency, Karinya and Alistair and their children will take on the care of Jyda, Marni and Michael for as long as Allira and Peter need.
- Koori education worker will continue to work with Marni.
- Review of support services and family progress will be held in three months time.

Part B: The interviews

There are three interviews in Part B of 'Sharing messages', each running for approximately six minutes:

1. Interview with Ray Ahmat, Rumbalara, and Jo Lockwood, Hume Department of Human Services
2. Interview with Aunty Fay Carter, CEO ACES
3. Interview with Uncle Danny Kelly and Aunty Elvie Kelly

1. Interview with Ray Ahmat, Rumbalara, and Jo Lockwood, Hume Department of Human Services

This interview includes information primarily about how the AFDM program works from the perspective of two of the people involved in the original pilot in Hume Region. Ray and Jo highlight the strengths of the program, the key messages, and the changes it has led to in relation to how Aboriginal families view Child Protection.

Please note: references made by Jo Lockwood in this interview regarding community referrals and diversion from child protection relate to the pilot program and are not applicable to current service delivery.

2. Interview with Aunty Fay Carter, CEO ACES

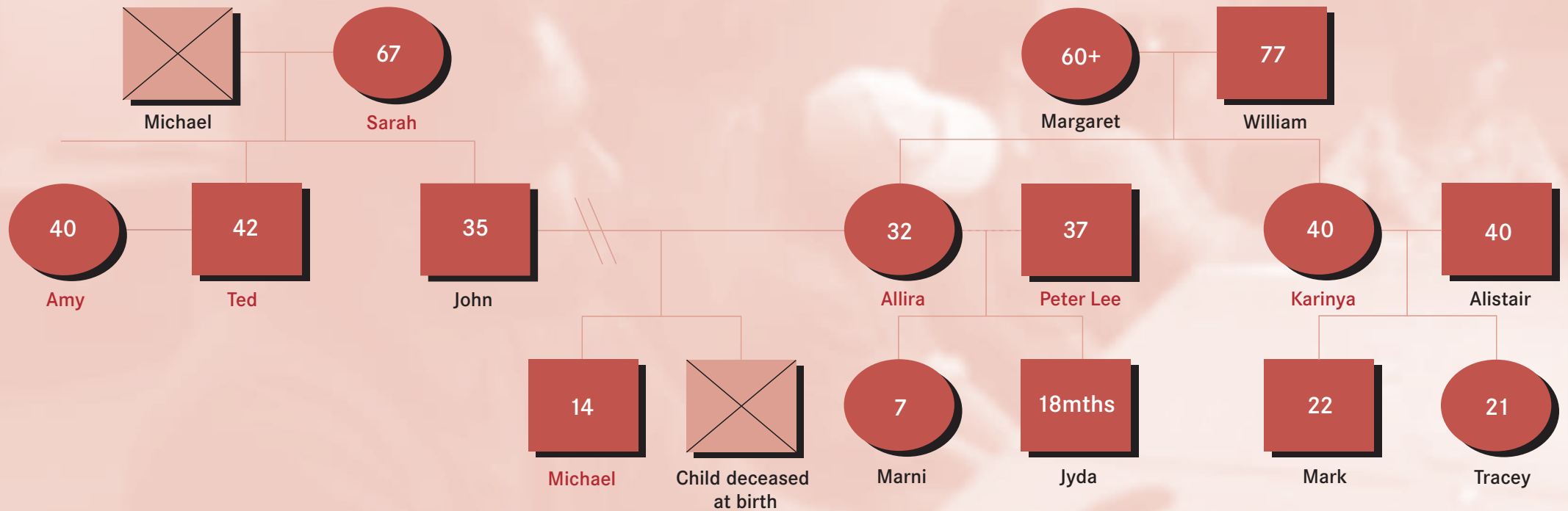
This interview highlights the role of the Elders in the AFDM program and more generally in the community. Aunty Fay provides lots of advice for Elders and talks about how the involvement of Elders is a key strength in the program.

3. Interview with Uncle Danny Kelly and Aunty Elvie Kelly

This interview outlines the Message Stick Model as a useful tool for working with Aboriginal families. The model was originally developed for the Muthi Miah Aboriginal Family Preservation Program in Swanhill.

Attachments – genogram

Genogram



Definition of terms:

This list is of the common terms used throughout the learning package, including dvd/video.

Aboriginal children and young people refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Aboriginal Child Placement Principle governs the practice of child protection workers when placing Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care. Its aim is to enhance and preserve Aboriginal children's sense of identity as Aboriginal, are connected to their family, community and culture.

Child Protection Orders made by the Children's Court of Victoria in relation to children and young people in need of protection.

Genogram is also known as the family tree of child or young person.

Substantiation: The decision following an investigation that the child or young person has been, is, or is likely to be in need of protection.

Referral: Child Protection caseworker has made a referral to AFDM for a family meeting or a referral to a support service to work with the family.

AFDM: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Decision Making.

ACSASS: Aboriginal Child Specialist and Support Service – provides advice to Child Protection in relation to all Aboriginal children and young people. This service is provided by VACCA and the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation.

Access: The contact a child has with a person who does not have custody.

Protective concerns: Concerns and worries about the harm a child has or is likely to suffer as a result of abuse or neglect.

Safety plan: A plan developed by the family how the child or young person will be kept safe from harm or neglect. Example: the child or young person will stay with their aunties or uncles when mum or dad are not coping with drug and alcohol use.

Notification: A report of suspected child abuse or neglect to Child Protection in the Department of Human Services. (relevant to *Children & Young Persons Act 1989*)

Bottom lines: Minimum expectations about a child's safety from harm. A term used by Child Protection workers in Department of Human Services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Decision Making Program

Key messages

Key messages

Preparation and planning: the referral process

Investing time equals good outcomes

- AFDM convenors organise a time to meet and discuss referrals with the Child Protection caseworker, Child Protection team leader and Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service **ACSASS** worker.
- When meeting with Child Protection and ACSASS, it is the role of convenors to gather as much information as possible about the family.
- Convenors need to have a sound understanding about the protective concerns.
- A meeting with support services needs to happen before meeting with the family. This meeting is to discuss what support is already in place for the child/ren, young person and family.

Engaging family members/young people

- Contact is made with family members who are current carer/s of the child/ren listed on the referral.
- Families will not fully understand the Aboriginal Family Decision Making (AFDM) program or Child Protection system. Offer information and time to explain the roles of both convenors and Elders.
- When talking to a young person, the same approach is taken—explain the program. If the young person does not want to attend the family meeting, ask them how they would like to be kept informed. Ask them would they like to write anything down to be tabled.
- Families need to be given the responsibility, opportunity and support to plan their family meeting.

If there is uncertainty about what name you should use when talking with family members, ask them.

Partnership

The AFDM model has been developed to involve key partners:

- Family members
- Community convenor (Aboriginal Agency)
- Child Protection convenor
- Elders
- Child Protection caseworker
- ACSASS worker
- Team leaders
- Unit managers

It is recognised that each person brings a wealth of experience and unique knowledge to the partnership. The AFDM process will not achieve the best outcomes for the child/ren or young people if there is not a commitment from everyone to the partnership.

It is equally recognised that without family involvement in the AFDM process the best outcome for the child/ren or young person cannot be achieved.

Roles in AFDM

Elders

- Elders provide cultural beliefs and values, which guide families in child rearing practices.
- Elders bring a wealth of wisdom and life experience to the AFDM program.
- Elders open and close each family meeting.
- Elders provide support to the family by talking with them about Child Protection concerns.
- Elders co-convene family meetings with convenors.

Child Protection AFDM convenor

- The Child Protection convenor brings to the AFDM program the expertise and knowledge from the case planning process and Child Protection perspective.
- The Child Protection convenor communicates the protective outcomes or ‘bottom lines’ to ensure the family meeting process supports and guides families in developing safety plans.
- The Child Protection convenor ensures decisions made as part of the AFDM program are in accordance with the relevant principles in Child Welfare law.
- The Child Protection convenor endorses the safety plan developed by family.
- The Child Protection convenor needs to provide, to both Community convenor and Elder, ongoing awareness of the Child Protection system.

AFDM Community convenor

- The Community convenor brings to the AFDM program a family and community perspective.
- The Community convenor provides cultural guidance and knowledge to enhance the Child Protection system when approaching families.
- The Community convenor leads the engagement of family members throughout the AFDM process.
- The Community convenor assists in communicating Child Protection ‘bottom lines’ with family members.
- The Community convenor needs to provide to the Child Protection convenor an ongoing awareness of dynamics that exist amongst family and community. This includes communicating an awareness of Aboriginal service providers.

Shared roles and responsibilities of convenors

- Provide ongoing support and information to Elders about their involvement in the program.
- Work collaboratively with Child Protection, ACSASS, support services, family and community to identify extended family and kinship networks.
- Provide a coordinated approach for families and service providers when they are involved in the AFDM process.
- Accept and undertake assessments of referrals

- Create opportunities for reflective practice, which involves convenors and Elders to discuss the process of AFDM and any concerns they have.
- Offer support and guidance to families in achieving achievable successful outcomes.
- Promote the principles of AFDM to Child Protection and other professional staff, promote and provide information about AFDM processes in all aspects of the program.

Sharing of information

- The AFDM process involves an exchange of information with many people as part of the initial planning of engaging families on the basis of convening meetings. It is understood the information is essential to support families in decision making when developing safety plans, and that casework practice supports the family to achieve the best outcomes for the child/ren or young person.
- Many of the agencies with which Child Protection works most closely are also bound by the ¹*Information Privacy Act 2000* (IPA) and *Health Records Act 2001* (HRA), and are also required to conform to the Department of Human Services Privacy Policy as a condition of their service agreements.
- Child welfare law supports professional information sharing in the interests of children.

Identifying concerns

- If the family has worries about role of convenors or Elder involvement, talk with the family about those worries.
- If the family has any worries about other family members, it is important to offer options in how to manage this. Providing information about how to resolve their issues, by way of mediation and or conflict resolution process.
- It is not the role of AFDM convenors or Elders to mediate between family members with issues of conflict.
- Maintain respect at all times when speaking with families about conflict.

¹ Case and Care Planning in Child Protection

Convening family meetings

- Families and young people need to feel they are in control during the family meeting process. Where it is realistic, convenors should identify that families offer a strength base for making good decisions regarding care for their children.
- Ask the family what things are important to them as a family.
- Convenors and the Elder can guide the family towards developing the safety plan.
- Keep offering a process to find solutions.

The role that convenors undertake in the AFDM process may challenge their own personal beliefs and values. It is important that convenors can talk to each other.

Sharing messages – session evaluation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Family Decision Making Program (AFDM) –

with Elders, Community convenors and Child Protection convenors

Your feedback is used to improve this session.

Please complete this evaluation as fully and honestly as you can.

Date: _____

Name: (optional) _____

Region: _____

Participants to please tick box?

☐ Elder

☐ Community convenor

☐ Child Protection convenor

☐ Other: (specify) _____

Section 1: The session

Please circle the appropriate number.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The content of this session was relevant to my role.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The learning materials (overheads, video etc.) were used effectively.	5	4	3	2	1
3. This session contained content that was new to me.	5	4	3	2	1
4. What I have learnt in this session will improve my practice.	5	4	3	2	1
5. Overall, the session was worthwhile.	5	4	3	2	1

Please comment if you circled 3 or less on any item.

Section 2: Evaluation of individual sessions

How would you rate the presentation of the following sessions?

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
Session 1 _____ Introduction to the day, Child Protection & AFDM	5	4	3	2	1
Session 2 _____ Video – ‘Sharing messages’ – The family meeting	5	4	3	2	1
Session 3 _____ Video – ‘Sharing messages’ – The interviews	5	4	3	2	1
Session 4 _____ Discussion	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: Please comment

1. What was the most important part of the program for you? What made it important?

2. Was there any part of the program that was not useful to you? Why?

3. Do you have any particular comments or suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for completing this evaluation

Sharing messages – session evaluation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Family Decision Making Program (AFDM) – with Elders

Your feedback is used to improve this session.

Please complete this evaluation as fully and honestly as you can.

Date: _____

Name: (optional) _____

Region: _____

Section 1: The session

Please circle the appropriate number.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The content of this session was relevant to my role.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The learning materials (overheads, video etc.) were used effectively.	5	4	3	2	1
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Section 2: Evaluation of individual sessions

How would you rate the presentation of the following sessions?

	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
Session 1 _____ Introduction to the day _____	5	4	3	2	1
Session 2 _____ Video – ‘Sharing messages’ _____	5	4	3	2	1
Session 3 _____ Discussion – Video _____	5	4	3	2	1

Section 3: Please comment

1. What was the most important part of the program for you? What made it important?

2. Was there any part of the program that was not useful to you? Why?

3. Do you have any particular comments or suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for completing this evaluation

Program documents

- Aboriginal Child Placement Principal Guide for Child Protection and careworkers.
- Child Protection Practice Instructions
 - Responding to Aboriginal children and young people
 - Permanent care for Aboriginal children
 - Cultural Support Plan
- Protocol between the Department of Human Services Child Protection Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (DHS and VACCA) 2002
- Message Sticks – Muthi Miah Family Preservation Program – Keeping Families Together “Our way”
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Support Plan guide and plan template
- Aboriginal Family Decision Making Program (AFDM) document.

Other documents to be added by regions

Muthi Miah Aboriginal Family Preservation Program

Keeping Families Together 'Our Way'



Muthi Miah Aboriginal Family Preservation Program

Keeping Families Together 'Our Way'

Acknowledgement

This document has been developed by staff of the Muthi Miah Aboriginal Family Preservation Program, Department of Human Services, and Loddon Mallee Region. These staff were: Danny Kelly, Elvie Kelly, Joyce Smith and Fiona McWhae.

Elvie Kelly created the designs and artwork for this document.

The support offered by Doug and Marilyn Nicholls, descendents of the Wattie Wattie tribe, regarding the message sticks is acknowledged and were greatly appreciated.

Cultural Importance

There are many learning's from the message sticks that are significant. They are symbolic to Aboriginal customs. They assisted tribes to live in harmony and respect one another.

In recognition of the cultural importance of the message sticks to Aboriginal people this document should be used for and by Aboriginal people.

Contents

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4. Movement between the Message Sticks	4

1. Sitting and Talking



Workers make initial contact with your family at this time. The family and the worker complete a referral form. This stage identifies problems within your family and the causes of these problems. It also looks at things that are working well within your family. Together, we decide what changes can be made to keep the children in the family, or to return the children to the family. There will be discussion at this time as to how Muthi Miah workers and the family can best work together to achieve changes. This is a two way process which depends on honesty, respect and confidentiality.

The Sitting and Talking Message Stick

The artwork represents the family and family members sitting down with the worker to talk about their situation, the difficulties and problems that are affecting the family.

The flag in the background symbolises the identity and strengths. The hands offer hope to make the changes necessary.

2. Hunting and Gathering – Casework with Family



In traditional Aboriginal communities, the men hunted and the women gathered.

In Aboriginal Family Preservation, the terms 'hunting and gathering' refer to the casework that will be done with the family. The work involves strengthening family skills, learning new methods of doing things and challenging difficulties to build the family. Extended family involvement in this process is important. Families may be linked with specialist services such as a program run by a local Aboriginal Co-operative or a non-Koori service that are seen by workers to be sensitive to Aboriginal culture.

The work at this stage is very important and depends on the willingness of the family to work closely with the worker if changes are going to occur. Often there is a lot of hard work done trying different ways of doing things. You need to let us know what is working for you and what isn't.

Going back to the 'Sitting and Talking' stage may be necessary if changes are not happening.

The Hunting and Gathering Message Stick

The artwork represents the family and other resources. The family is in the middle. The emu feet represent the flow of information to and from the service and extended family network.

3. Song and Dance



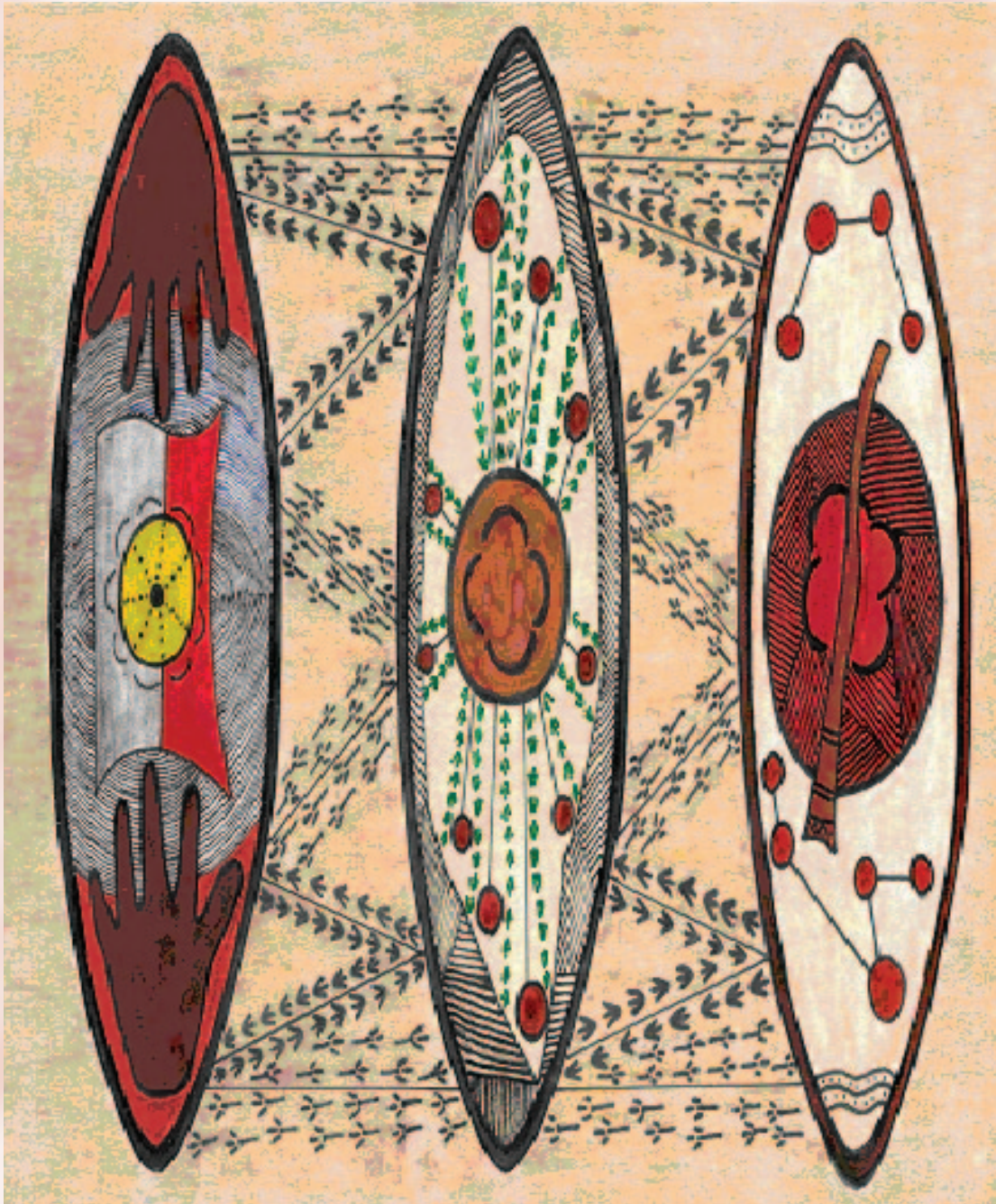
'Song and Dance' represents a time when your family celebrates the changes that have been made which have resulted in either the child(ren) remaining in the home OR a child(ren) returning to the family. This is a time to be rewarded for the hard work that the family has achieved. Your family will choose what kind of 'Song and Dance' you would like.

The Song and Dance Message Stick

The artwork symbolizes the family's celebration of changes made. The river flows symbolize energy and the didgeridoo represents music, song or dance. The family is intact.

4. Movement between the Message Sticks

Diagram indicates the three message sticks, lines to indicate movement between the three sticks are added.



It is important to realise that movement can occur between the message sticks at any time. A family in the 'hunting and gathering' stage may need to step back into 'sitting and talking' frequently to review their plans. Small 'song and dances' may be held during earlier stages to celebrate small changes.

