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| Good Practice Bulletin |
| Spotlight on Aboriginal children  Office of Professional Practice, Issue 11, July 2018 |

# Chief Practitioner’s welcome

# Tracy Beaton

Continuity of cultural identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is vital to health and wellbeing. Cultural connection provides Aboriginal children and young people a sense of belonging, self-worth, and pride. It is a core part of identity and supports Aboriginal children to grow up to be strong and proud members of their communities.

Due to the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are overrepresented in our child protection system. As child protection practitioners, we are committed to fully supporting the cultural needs of Aboriginal children. Working closely and collaboratively with Aboriginal families and Aboriginal agencies supports decision-making. Good practice is informed by the principles of respect and self-determination. We strive at all times to make meaningful cultural plans, find family, and wherever possible, place Aboriginal children with Aboriginal families.

## State-wide Principal Practitioner Aboriginal Children and Families

Sonia Harvey joined the department in June this year to take up the role of State-wide Principal Practitioner, Aboriginal Children and Families. This position realises key recommendations from the Commission for Children and Young People who examined our work with Aboriginal children (through Taskforce 1000, and two separate inquiries: *Always was always will be Koori children* and *In the child’s best interests*). The role involves leading capacity development for practitioners and guiding service understanding of the key reforms central to Aboriginal children and their families.

Sonia is a proud Kamilaroi woman who has lived and worked in Victoria for the majority of her of life. Sonia has worked extensively across the Aboriginal sector and has experience in Aboriginal Cultural Competence, Aboriginal Children Aboriginal Care reforms, Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health reforms, Early Start Kindergarten initiatives, Aboriginal Best Start, Aboriginal In-Home Support and Home Based Learning, family violence and child protection. Sonia also has experience in various Closing the Gap initiatives such as the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Sonia is a qualified social worker, and holds qualifications in Indigenous Studies and Criminology from the University of Melbourne. She has also been an Aboriginal kinship carer for many years.

## National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day - 4 August

**'They are the future and the carriers of our stories'** – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day is held every year on 4 August. This year marks the 30th year of this event. The day is an opportunity for the community to show their support for Aboriginal children and learn about the fundamental role family, community, and culture play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child. The theme for Children's Day 2018 on **4 August 2018** is *Celebrating Our Children for 30 years*. You may like to host an event and spread the word in your office.

## Case study

JP is 16 and a proud young Aboriginal man. Both his parents are Aboriginal.

JP’s case was allocated to you from the investigation team and you are working voluntarily with the family. You have been told JP is smoking cannabis every day and rarely makes it to school. He has told the school counsellor that he often feels anxious. He feels worst at night time, managing only a few hours sleep most nights. His mum’s boyfriend moved in last month. He punched JP in the face last week and JP has been couch surfing with friends since then.

Some of your colleagues have known JP since he was a baby. You read the details of twelve closed reports regarding JP, the first when he was just two months old. Family violence has been the primary risk factor for JP. He has been homeless a number of times and moved from refuge to refuge.

## Discussion prompts

As you build a relationship with JP, how will you go about strengthening his connection to his culture and the Aboriginal community he identifies with? Who can help?

What do you need to include in his case plan?

What conversations can you have with JP about his culture and community? What does community mean to him? Who does he turn to in the community for support?

If a decision is made to place JP in out-of-home care, what must be considered?

# Here are some tips:

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| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Consult the Child Protection Manual, specifically [Aboriginal children – advice section](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children) |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Contact the Aboriginal Child Specialist and Support Service (ACSASS) to consult about JP and his family and invite them to attend the home visit with you. If ACSASS is unable to visit the child or family, or a child or family does not want the service involved – you can liaise and visit with any other Aboriginal service provider – and keep consulting ACSASS. ACSASS can assist you with culturally safe strategies to engage with JP. |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Talk to your practice leaders and principal practitioners – get advice and support about working with Aboriginal children. |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Get to know your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation – they are there to help you work with Aboriginal children and support you to develop a cultural plan. |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | An Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM) meeting can also be a case planning meeting – or a case plan review meeting – consult with your AFLDM convenor and use the culturally attuned case planning approach creatively. |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Have a look at [Deadly Story](https://www.deadlystory.com/). This resource can assist you to increase your understanding of culture as supporting healing, increasing protective factors, resilience, self-esteem and pride leading to better outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. |

On behalf of the Office of Professional Practice, we hope you have found this issue of the Good Practice Bulletin useful. If you have any feedback or ideas about what you would find useful to include, please email *officeofprofessionalpractice@dhhs.vic.gov.au*

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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