



SUMMARY SHEET

‘The Truth of Our Stories’: A mixed method evaluation of Elder and community-led cultural training for out-of-home care agency workers and non-Indigenous foster carers in Australia

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Background

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been subjected to colonial dispossession from culture, language, family and Country. The systematic removal of children resulted in the ‘Stolen Generations’. The intergenerational trauma from colonisation and increasing rates of contemporary child removal is an ongoing concern and children removed from their families continue to experience long term poor health and wellbeing outcomes. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle was implemented in 2013 to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care are living with immediate or extended kin whenever possible. Yet 59% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in non-Indigenous out-of-home care (OOHC) arrangements or with non-Indigenous relatives. Truth-telling is emerging as an important approach to healing and for creating a greater awareness and understanding in the non-Indigenous community of the impact of colonisation.

In the health and social services sector, culturally competent workforces are key to repairing harm, and having access to effective cultural training is critical. In this research, the cultural training needs of OOHC agency workers were ascertained through focus groups. Thirty-nine participants, who were mainly non-Indigenous workers employed to manage foster care arrangements with Aboriginal children, identified a lack of high-quality cultural training for developing the knowledge and skills they needed to provide culturally secure services. As a result, the Elder Co-researchers, advisory group members and the OOHC research team codesigned a cultural training workshop called ‘The Truth of Our Stories’.

The Elder Co-researchers identified seven Aboriginal community members to share their historical and contemporary child removal experiences with agency workers and non-Indigenous foster carers. We provided a four-hour training session to 42 agency workers (35) and non-Indigenous foster carers (7), aimed at 1. assisting participants to link historical and contemporary practice; 2. promoting culturally secure ways of working collaboratively and respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, and 3. ways to access cultural activities and resources. We co-designed a pre and post training tool to explore participant confidence, knowledge and practices for providing culturally secure services and for accessing culturally specific resources to Aboriginal children in their care. All participants provided informed consent, and the training session was videoed.

Key Findings

- Participants found authentic story-telling impactful.
- Participants developed greater knowledge and understanding about the historical, cultural and social contexts of child protection practices and its consequences.
- Pre training, foster carers reported higher confidence levels than agency workers engaging with Aboriginal Elders in regional and remote communities
- Post training, agency workers reported greater increases in confidence for being able to engage with Aboriginal Elders in regional and remote communities
- Participants reported greater confidence for all elements of the training, with moderate to large gains in knowledge and confidence in many aspects of the training.
- The largest confidence and knowledge gains were related to information provided about Elders, ACCO’s and specific cultural resources.

Recommendations

- The Truth of Our stories cultural training was transformative. We recommend that OOHC and mainstream health social and services across Australia, consider co-designing cultural training that incorporates truth-telling with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in which they work.

Journal Article Available: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/SWPS/article/view/20472>

Video Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOLCQrAKq-Y>

Participant Group Photo

