
CARING FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE

Foster Care Association of Victoria Position:

When an agency places an Aboriginal child or young person in a foster care placement, it is important that carers consider their unique needs. FCAV believes the care provided must allow the child or young person to remain connected to their family, community and culture. Being a culturally competent foster carer takes time. There is much to learn about caring for an Aboriginal child. It is important that the children in your care grow up being proud of their heritage and cultural identity. It is important for foster carers to learn ways to integrate Aboriginal culture into family life. Connection to community, heritage, family history and culture are fundamental ingredients.

CARER CONSIDERATIONS

- It is essential that carers support the child to develop and maintain relationships with his or her birth parents and extended family; this is of particular significance given the history of removal and alienation of children from their Aboriginal birth families in the period of the 'Stolen Generations'.
- The families of many Aboriginal children in care are disconnected from their Aboriginal cultural heritage (as a result of policies associated with colonisation). Often this means that the child in your care is the first person within four or more generations who identifies as Aboriginal.
- A child's relationships with family underpin the connection to his or her Aboriginal cultural heritage: connectedness to cultural heritage is experienced through family relationships. This is the case even when families are "disconnected". Family relationships are crucial for the experience of cultural connectedness.
- There are many Aboriginal tribes and clans within Australia and there are many different languages as well. Understanding your foster child's history and background is fundamental to their upbringing as there is not one distinct Aboriginality.
- Possible differences in world views and beliefs and different types of behaviours and language communication patterns can be culturally based.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

The Victorian government's *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Matrix* describes the understandings, principles and service context that underpin Aboriginal cultural competence. Culturally competent care considers the culture of Aboriginal children so carers can provide appropriate care. Cultural competence needs to be built over time, and requires personal reflection.

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/580848/cultural_competence_matrix_2008.pdf

CULTURAL SUPPORT PLANS

A Cultural Support Plan (CSP) is a requirement for Aboriginal children subject to Guardianship Orders. Child Protection lead the process of meeting with the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), foster care agency, family and others to construct a plan relevant for each child. The CSP is a tool used to assist us to ensure Aboriginal children on Guardianship Orders remain connected to their families, communities and culture. It includes information on cultural identity, Aboriginal community, tribal group, community supports, and provides a good outline for how best to competently care for your foster child.

<http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/aboriginal-children/cultural-support-plans>

Whilst it is not a legal requirement, good practice suggests cultural support plans should be developed for all Aboriginal children in Out Of Home Care. When an Aboriginal child is placed with non-Aboriginal foster carers, we must ensure maintenance of the child's culture and identity, through contact with the child's community. For children who are not subject to Guardianship Orders, cultural planning may form a part of the statutory case plan, and will be discussed within care teams.

SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER CARERS TO LEARN ABOUT CULTURALLY COMPETENT CARE

Your local ACCO is a valuable resource for all carers of Aboriginal children and young people. A list of Aboriginal organisations that provide child and family services is available at <https://dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/aboriginal-children-aboriginal-care-program>

The publication *Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in out of Home Care* is a very useful tool to assist you with your care that provides information, resources, childcare centres, health services and government publications for your information. It costs \$20.00 and is available at <http://www.vacca.org/shop/caring-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-in-out-of-home-care/>

TRAINING AND SUPPORT

FCAV strongly encourages all carers to attend training opportunities relating to the care of Aboriginal children and young people in order to gain insight into Aboriginal culture, and to understand the role of a culturally competent foster carer. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), based in the North West Metropolitan Region, runs an excellent training program called *Nikara's Journey*. This program is aimed at helping non-Aboriginal carers learn about competently and appropriately caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in out of home care.

WAYS OF PROMOTING ABORIGINAL CULTURE

There are many ways to connect a child to their culture that are also age specific. You may fill your house with Aboriginal dream time story books, or invest in Aboriginal toys. Many resources such as movies and books are available via www.yarnstrongsista.com. They offer online creative educational experiences such as games, craft kits, books, fabrics and dolls for all ages.

Flagworld sells Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags in 5 different sizes. \$RRP - \$65 - \$365
<http://www.flags2000.com.au/australia.htm>

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC) have great resources including a book for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children titled *I am strong in my Culture* which is available to download in PDF form and able to be purchased for \$17 plus shipping. SNAICC also have many other good resources that are available to view or purchase.
<http://www.snaicc.org.au/>

The **Visitors Centre** in Federation Square provides brochures on historical Aboriginal sites and trails around Victoria and provide free maps for travel destinations.

Life books are an important and creative way to promote Aboriginal culture through the construction of a life narrative. A book or a trinket box may include memories and keepsakes, and may be taken from placement to placement, and built upon. Life books are particularly useful for developing a child's sense of identity and self esteem. Life books can include school photos, art work, awards and photos of significant events such as National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC)

week. These are pieces of information that paint a story about the child's life, their heritage, origins, culture and friends. You can obtain these from VACCA or through your foster care agency.

CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY

There are many ways to connect your foster child to his/her Aboriginal community. There are events such as NAIDOC, Sorry Day, and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day to celebrate with your foster child. VACCA has produced the *Deadly Culture Diary* which outlines events in Victoria. Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation has an online calendar of events at <http://www.yynac.com.au>

There are also many play groups, health services, magazines, museums, trails, subscriptions, and activities that are available to connect your foster child or young person to their community. VACCA has a resource information page: <http://www.vacca.org/>

THE HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA AND CULTURE

There are many readily available resources that provide detailed information on the history of Aboriginal Australia. The *Australia Indigenous Culture & History* page: <http://australia.gov.au/topics/culture-history-and-sport/indigenous-culture-and-history> provides high-quality information about all aspects of Aboriginal life.

The *Koorie Heritage Trust*, 250 King Street, Melbourne, has a permanent, interactive exhibition that provides information on the history of Aboriginal Australians. The Trust has access to family photos and can attempt to trace the heritage and family history of the foster child or young person in your care.

Melbourne Museum is home to *Bunjilaka*, a living cultural centre for Victoria's Aboriginal community and all those wishing to learn more about Australia's Indigenous Cultures. www.museumvictoria.com.au