

Strengthening Cultural Identity and Connection for Children in Out-of-Home Care

Authors:

Thompson K¹, Healy, K¹, Venables J¹

¹School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, The University of Queensland

Background:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disproportionately represented in the Australian child protection system. In Australia, as of 30 June 2022, approximately 19,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in out-of-home care (OOHC). Little is known about how cultural identity and connection is facilitated and maintained for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children OOHC in Queensland, Australia.

Methods:

This qualitative study utilised semi-structured interviews and yarning circles to explore the perspectives of 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, and 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, community leaders, Elders, policy makers and key informants (hereafter referred to as key stakeholders) in Queensland, Australia. Research explored how cultural identity and connection are defined, supported, and maintained for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.

Results:

Key stakeholders play a crucial role in facilitating and maintaining cultural identity and connection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC. While child protection legislation mandates cultural support plans (CSPs), stakeholders felt that CSPs were often superficial, focusing on activities like attending NAIDOC week activities or watching National Indigenous Television. Stakeholders reported a need for more individualised and meaningful approaches to cultural connection, considering each child's background and cultural needs.

Conclusions:

This highlights the importance of moving beyond a "checkbox" approach to cultural identity and connection in OOHC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The findings suggest CSPs should be tailored to each child's cultural background, interests, and goals. Further, stakeholders require adequate training and resources to understand the impact of cultural identity and connection on social and emotional wellbeing, and effectively support cultural connection. This includes fostering relationships with communities and Elders. Finally, genuine, collaborative partnerships between stakeholders, families, and communities are crucial for building and sustaining cultural connections for children in OOHC.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

This study is part of the broader research project 'Enhancing Children's Journey Through Out-of-Home Care,' funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant. I also recognise the financial support (Top-Up Scholarship) received from the University of Queensland Poche Centre for Indigenous Health as part of my PhD studies.