

## Introduction

For an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child his or her family, community, clan, traditions and customs are integral to the development of their sense of identity. Connections to these elements of community and culture impact significantly on the child's social, emotional, health, educational and psychological development and shape who they become as they progress through adolescence and into adulthood.

The Department of Communities (Child Safety) recognises the detrimental and lasting effects of past government policies on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities (refer to the practice paper [Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)). As a result, Child Safety endeavours to protect the rights of future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system and minimising the trauma to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from statutory intervention, when such intervention is deemed necessary.

When Child Safety intervenes in the life of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, staff must ensure that the services delivered are respectful, culturally appropriate and timely, and maintain the child's connections with family, community and culture. The cultural support plan, which forms part of the case plan for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, ensures that the child maintains their links with safe and protective family, community and cultural supports.

This practice resource provides guidance on:

- the purpose of a cultural support plan
- who must have a cultural support plan
- who should participate in the development of a cultural support plan
- developing the cultural support plan
- information to be recorded in a cultural support plan
- recording, approving and distributing a cultural support plan
- reviewing a cultural support plan
- key concepts.

## Purpose of a cultural support plan

The cultural support plan ensures that every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child retains his or her connections to family, community and culture regardless of their placement. It is a key component of the case planning process for every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child.

The child's cultural support plan is vital to the delivery of culturally appropriate child protection services because it:

- captures information about that particular child's family, community and personal history
- helps increase the knowledge and understanding of the child's place in their family, kinship and community structure
- helps nurture and support the child while strengthening their cultural identity and connections
- assists with the child's understanding of their community networks and cultural heritage
- documents arrangements for contact with family and significant community members

- identifies opportunities for the child's participation in activities and experiences that will maintain their links with family, community and culture
- helps ensure that important cultural and family information is maintained for any child who is too young to contribute to their own cultural support plan or for a child who does not want to identify with their community or culture.

A child's cultural support plan is an important information and planning tool that is tailored to an individual Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child's needs and circumstances.

## **Who must have a cultural support plan**

A cultural support plan is required for every Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child who is subject to ongoing intervention. The initial cultural support plan should be developed when the first case plan is developed during the family group meeting.

### **Identifying Indigenous status**

When developing the cultural support plan for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, Child Safety staff should identify, confirm and record the child's indigenous status. Self-identification or identification of the child by his or her parents, or other persons from the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, should be confirmed in collaboration with family members at the family group meeting.

For the purpose of identifying a child's indigenous status:

- an Aboriginal person is a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994)
- a Torres Strait Islander is a person of Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as a Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994).

### **When a child is not in an out-of-home care placement**

When a child is subject to intervention with parental agreement or a directive or supervision order, the team leader may decide that it is not necessary to complete a comprehensive cultural support plan for the child, and that it is appropriate to only record minimal information in the cultural support plan, or to state that the family will continue to meet the cultural needs of the child. This may occur when:

- the family will generally be able to continue to meet the cultural needs of the child, as they did prior to Child Safety involvement
- the family find it intrusive for Child Safety to complete a cultural support plan whilst the child is still in their care.

### **When a child is subject to a child protection care agreement**

When a child is subject to a child protection care agreement, the team leader may decide that it is not necessary to complete a comprehensive cultural support plan for the child, after considering:

- the length of time the child will remain in care
- whether the child is placed with a kinship carer or culturally appropriate carer

- how much contact the child is having with extended family
- whether there is a specific identified cultural need.

If, in either of the two circumstances outlined above, the family request assistance with their cultural identity and connectedness, a comprehensive cultural support plan can be developed with the family, as outlined below.

When any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child does not choose to identify with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage and community, cultural information should still be recorded about that child in the cultural support plan within the child's case plan. The information captured in this document should be gathered, in partnership with the family group meeting, from family and community members.

### **Who should participate in the development of the cultural support plan**

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child's cultural support plan must be developed in partnership with:

- the child (where age appropriate)
- the family
- the family group meeting participants
- the identified Child Safety Support Officer, when applicable
- workers from relevant local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander agencies
- community Elders
- the child's carer
- any other individuals who have been identified as significant in the child's life.

Each of these individuals will provide important information about the child and his or her family, community and culture, which must be captured in the cultural support plan.

### **Developing the cultural support plan**

The development of a child's cultural support plan is an important task that must be completed with sensitivity and in partnership with the child, when age and developmentally appropriate, the family, the family group meeting participants, community Elders and local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander workers. It is to be tailored to the child's personal circumstances and needs (see Attachment 1 - Example of a cultural support plan).

Child Safety is responsible for ensuring that:

- the cultural support plan is developed in conjunction with the relevant people noted above
- the family group meeting convenor facilitates discussions about the cultural support plan during the family group meeting
- arrangements for regular contact with at least one person who shares the child's cultural background are determined
- the information gathered about the child and his or her family, relationships, community connections and culture is used in the development of the cultural support plan – this may include information from the identified Child Safety Support Officer and family group meeting participants.

Any additional information gathered from the child and his or her family and community during the course of ongoing intervention can be recorded in case notes and added to the case plan or cultural support plan during the next review of the case plan.

## **Information to be recorded in a cultural support plan**

The cultural support plan should include information about:

### **The child's clan, language, ethnic, cultural, Island and/or community group**

- this information will be provided by family and community members
- additional information will be provided by the family group meeting participants and the identified Child Safety Support Officer
- other relevant information can also be sourced through reference searches such as Linkup and through local and state libraries
- ensure that local community Elders have been identified in the cultural support plan
- the names and contact details of family members or significant persons who can maintain and support the child's cultural identity must be included in the plan.

### **The parent's and siblings' clan, language, ethnic, cultural, Island and/or community group**

- this information will be provided by family and community members, or family group meeting participants
- other relevant information can also be sourced through reference searches such as Linkup and through local and state libraries.

### **Arrangements for activities or experiences that will support and preserve the child's cultural identity and connection to their community and culture**

Information should be included about:

- who will be involved in the activities with the child
- the benefits for the child from their participation in the activities or experiences
- the location of the activities or events
- any financial support or approval required from Child Safety
- any requirements in relation to supervision and who is to undertake this role.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to carefully assess whether persons included in the proposed activities present any risk to the child's safety and well-being.

Activities and experiences that could be considered in the cultural support plan include:

- contact with siblings, extended family members, community members, Elders
- attending cultural events such as NAIDOC week, tombstone openings, the unveiling of the head stone (Torres Strait Islander specific), Dreaming Festival and other local cultural

events

- participating in age appropriate cultural ceremonies
- attending family events such as family reunions or weddings
- engaging and participating in sporting, arts, leisure and recreational activities
- obtaining required services, such as health, legal or child care services, through Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community services.

### **Supports required by the carer to maintain and support activities outlined in the cultural support plan**

The plan should include information about:

- financial support from Child Safety
- approval required from Child Safety for travel
- information and training required by the carer

Carer support, where relevant, may include:

- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mentor
- provision of books, artwork or information from the internet that relates to the specific cultural groups of that child
- someone attending community events with the carer for the first time
- introducing carers to key community members
- contact by the identified Child Safety Support Officer or the recognised entity to help the carer understand the child's history, culture and current issues
- providing the carer with an annual events calendar
- providing the carer with a list of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and contacts and particularly those who have a personal connection to the child
- attending relevant training programs or workshops.

### **People with whom arrangements have been made for contact with the child to support and develop their cultural identity**

This should include information about:

- who will be involved in contact with the child
- their relationship to the child and benefits for the child from contact
- the frequency and location of contact
- any additional support provided by these persons and what this support will include
- any requirements in relation to supervision and who is to undertake this role
- regular contact with at least one person who shares the child's cultural background
- individuals that should not have contact with the child and the reason for this restriction.

## Recording, approving and distributing the cultural support plan

The cultural support plan for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child must be recorded within the case plan in ICMS. The person responsible for recording the cultural support plan is one of either:

- the departmental family group meeting convenor, when the initial case plan is developed during a family group meeting
- the CSO with case responsibility, if the family group meeting convenor is a private convenor, or the case plan is developed without a family group meeting being held.

The information recorded in the child's cultural support plan must be tailored to that child's needs and the relevant resources within their family and community. When recording information in the cultural support plan ensure that:

- the information is clear
- sufficient detail is provided for individuals to action their responsibilities with the plan
- the language used is culturally sensitive
- it does not include any information about family or community members that is not directly relevant to addressing the child's cultural needs.

As it forms part of the case plan, the cultural support plan would be endorsed by a team leader or senior practitioner within seven days of the family group meeting.

Once the case plan is endorsed, a copy of the cultural support plan will be provided to:

- the child (where age and developmentally appropriate)
- when it was not age or developmentally appropriate to provide the child with a copy of the cultural support plan, explain the cultural support plan to the child in a way that is appropriate to their age and ability to understand
- the child's parents
- anyone other individuals responsible for action in the plan
- the child's foster or kinship carer and/or the licensed care service involved in implementing the cultural support plan
- the family group meeting and any Elder and other respected person of the child's community who will play a role in supporting the implementation of the cultural support plan.

## Reviewing a cultural support plan

The cultural support plan forms part of the child's case plan and is reviewed and updated whenever the case plan is reviewed. It is a fluid document that must change with the changes in the child's needs and circumstances. Child Safety is responsible regularly reviewing the cultural support plan, in consultation with the CSO, the child, when age and developmentally appropriate, the family and other relevant individuals, to ensure it includes addresses any new cultural information obtained between reviews, and any changes in the child's needs or circumstances including:

- changes in the child's placement
- changes to activities - as the child grows his or her experiences should be age appropriate
- plans for reunification or transition from care
- changes to individuals who will have contact with the child.

## **A child subject to a long-term guardianship order**

Following the making of a child protection order granting long-term guardianship to a suitable person the guardian assumes full responsibility for identifying and responding to the child's cultural needs on an ongoing basis. The guardian may be eligible for financial assistance in some circumstances, to meet the child's cultural needs.

### **Key concepts**

#### **Aboriginal person**

An Aboriginal person is a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994).

#### **Compatible**

To determine compatibility, whether the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person still maintains a culture connection to community and people, information should be gathered from the following sources:

- Family
- Community leaders and Elders
- Recognised entity staff.

**Example:** Mother of a child is in Doomadgee. Mother's brother (closest sibling) is in Mt Isa and outside of community. Placement with the mother's brother may be a more 'compatible' placement for the child. To determine compatibility there needs to be a level of acceptance and approval from community.

#### **Cultural diversity**

There are two distinct groups of Indigenous peoples in Australia, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. These two groups are ethnically distinct with different histories. It is very important to acknowledge that an individual person has the right to identify with one or more cultures to which they belong.

Child Safety staff have a statutory responsibility to identify Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children to ensure that ongoing intervention reflects culturally appropriate service delivery.

#### **Culture**

Culture consists of accepted and traditionally patterned ways of being and behaving. It is a common understanding shared by members of a group or community, and it includes land, sea, beliefs, spirituality, language, stories, identity and ways of living and working.

#### **Extended family**

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is not isolated from the rest of the community. Children belong to the whole community, therefore, many adults and children are involved in a child's life and in his or her upbringing. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children are the responsibility of the whole extended family and community. In many communities, the family is biological and classified by 'skin' groupings, which defines responsibilities and obligations.

### **Mob/community group**

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples may belong to more than one community. For example, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person's communities may include where they come from, where their family is and where they live or work. When completing these fields, it is important to record the child's information first, then the parents, recognising that the mother and father may come from different cultural backgrounds to the child.

### **Island group**

Island group refers to coastal groups such as Torres Strait Island groups, Tasmanian Island groups and Australian Island groups, for example, Stradbroke Island (Noonucal), North Keppel (Kanome) Tiwi, Melville.

The Torres Strait Islands are made up of the far western, western, western central, eastern and eastern island groups. For example, Badu Island is western, Thursday Island (Waiben) is central and Murray Island (Mer) is eastern.

### **Clan group**

The clan is a local descent group, larger than a family, but based on family links through a common ancestry, tribe, nation and family/community groups.

### **Language groups**

Language groups are defined by the dialects spoken within different clan groups and community groups. One clan could speak up to four different languages within an Island or language group.

### **Near**

'Near' could mean geographical distance or could mean near in terms of family connection and cultural connection.

**For example:** Burketown and Doomadgee - family groups from Doomadgee may also have family groups in Burketown. The concept of 'near' would be tested with the family, local Elders and the recognised entity.

### **Skin group**

Skin group refers to the 'moity system' where an Aboriginal person is born into a family and given a particular skin group which will follow a maternal or paternal line. In particular, skin groups govern the daily interaction and communication between the differing skin groups and may pre-determine who they can marry and the customs and traditions they will follow and hold in trust to be forwarded down in generational order, which is specially held by their skin groups.

### **Torres Strait Islander**

A Torres Strait Islander is a person of Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as a Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1994).

## Totems

Totems have particular spiritual religious significance. In some instances it is considered a cultural 'taboo' to note this information. **Under no circumstances** should totems be recorded unless permission has been given by the correct Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person responsible for passing on that knowledge - this may be an Elder or family or community member.

## Attachment 1

This cultural support plan is only provided as an example. The information outlined below represents some, not all, of the information that could be included in a cultural support plan - each plan should be tailored to the identified needs and the available resources within the family and community.

## Cultural support plan

Is the subject child Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander  Yes  No

If Yes is selected, please check the relevant person record to ensure the Indigenous status has been updated and create a recognised entity participation form.

Does the child belong to any other cultural community?  Yes  No

**Name of clan / language group / ethnic group or cultural group / island or other cultural community group the child belongs to?**

Community 1. Julie Smith belongs to Barkindji clan group in NSW. She has an extensive extended family network in the town of Bourke. Her grandparents have maintained their connection with extended family and community.

Community 2. Julie currently lives and participates as an Aboriginal person in the Mt Gravatt community.

**Name of mob / community and / or island group, clan group, language group and skin group the child's siblings, mother and father belong to?**

Julie's Mother, Tennille Smith, belongs to Barkindji clan group in Bourke NSW. Miss Smith is currently residing in the Mt Gravatt area.

Julie's Father, Bruce Willy, is a member of the Wakka Wakka people and is currently residing in the Cherbourg Community.

**What activities will the child be involved in to support and preserve their sense of cultural identity and links? What help do they need to take part in these activities?**

It is strongly recommended that Julie is supported to travel interstate to help establish and maintain her links to her traditional country, relationships and networks with extended family and community members. It is recommended that the department support an annual visit to NSW and that this be maintained in the future.

It is recommended that Julie attend age appropriate local, state and national cultural events. This will support Julie to identify with the local Aboriginal community and provide an avenue where she can participate in cultural expression in both traditional and contemporary forms. These events include

NAIDOC, Dreaming Fest and any other local cultural events that are recommended by the Identified CSSO or family group meeting.

It is important for Julie to learn about and understand her cultural heritage and identity. This will help her to grow up strong and proud, knowing who she is, where she comes from and how she fits into her community. This is a way of keeping Julie connected to her family, community and culture.

Julie's family has identified there are several extended family members that reside in NSW that would be beneficial for Julie to have a relationship and contact with to maintain connection to extended family. Julie's carer is willing to facilitate this process so that Julie can develop a relationship with her extended family networks.

The CSSC, family group meeting, family and carer to develop a life booklet with photo's and stories of Julie's family this will ultimately support Julie to build a understanding of her family and cultural connection.

**What support does the child's carer need to maintain and support the arrangements and activities for the child? What support and help do they also need to feel comfortable and confident in attending and participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other cultural community events?**

The CSSC Manager to approve payment of financial costs for the carer and child to travel interstate.

The approval of this travel for Julie is important because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Communities are very different and have their own unique histories, beliefs and values. It is respectful to recognise that each culture has its own identity and Child Safety Services must ensure that Julie is given the opportunity to connect with the histories, beliefs and values of her family and community in NSW.

Child Safety to request that the family group meeting and other relevant community agencies support Julie in gaining her Aboriginality certificates and the development of a genogram/family tree.

Julie will be able to learn about her Aboriginal culture through language, dancing, music, fishing, bushwalking and many other cultural events. Julie should be supported by her CSO and carer attend family get-togethers or other community events and cultural activities such as NAIDOC.

It is recommended that the CSO and family group meeting meet with Julie's carer to identify supports that will help her to maintain Julie's connections with her family, community and culture. These supports might include:

- An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mentor, such as another carer, a worker from the family group meeting or an identified Child Safety Support Officer
- Provision of books, artwork, information from the internet that relates to the specific cultural groups of that child or young person
- Someone attending community events with the carer for the first time
- Introducing her carer to key community members
- Providing the carer with training/foster carer support from the Placement Services Unit

- Helping the carer understand the history, culture and current issues
- Providing the carer with an annual events calendar
- Providing the carer with a list of local indigenous services and contacts
- Ensuring the local community elders are identified in the cultural support plan
- Providing a map of Aboriginal Australia and information about the groups of people in a particular region

**People with whom arrangements have been made for contact with the child to support and develop their cultural identity.**

Name	Relationship	Contact details
Tenille Smith	Mother	Twice weekly 2hours
Bruce Willy	Father	Fortnightly supervised contact
Elsie Smith	Grandmother	Weekly phone contact
John Smith	Brother	Weekly contact plus phone contact
Mary Willy	Cousin	Monthly contact plus phone contact
Tom Batten - Uncle in Moree	Uncle	Fortnightly phone contact
Debbie Anderson - Aunty in Tweed Heads	Aunty	Fortnightly phone contact
Patricia Smith - Great Aunty live in Taree NSW	Great Aunty	Monthly phone contact
Peter Willy	Uncle	Monthly phone contact
Dr Peter Wallace	CYMHS - Counsellor	Attends 1 hour session after school once a month
Mary Doctor	Indigenous Health Service Woolloongabba – Local GP	Attends appointments once a month or as required