

Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy
Workforce Development Project

CONSOLIDATED REPORT

NOVEMBER 2019



About AbSec

AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation is the peak Aboriginal child and family organisation in NSW. AbSec is committed to advocating on behalf of Aboriginal children, families, carers and communities, and to ensure they have access to the services and supports they need to keep Aboriginal children safe and provide them the best possible opportunities to fulfil their potential through Aboriginal community controlled organisations

Central to this vision is the need to develop a tailored approach to Aboriginal child and family supports delivering universal, targeted and tertiary services within communities that cover the entire continuum of support and reflect the broader familial and community context of clients. Such services and supports would operate to mitigate risk factors or vulnerabilities thereby reducing the need for more intensive or invasive interventions.

Our vision is that Aboriginal children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal families and communities, and are raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture surrounded by holistic supports. In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- ⊙ acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal communities;
- ⊙ acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal families;
- ⊙ underpinning the rights of Aboriginal people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children and families;
- ⊙ being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal control in delivering for Aboriginal children, families and communities; and
- ⊙ committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive

Published November 2019

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Executive Summary

Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy: Workforce development Project Consolidated Report

As part of the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy, AbSec was contracted by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) to progress initiatives to enhance current workforce capabilities and promote employment opportunities in the sector. AbSec sought to learn what the workforce development needs are within the Aboriginal child and family sector. The findings were presented to DCJ in November 2019 in a report titled: “Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy: Workforce Development Project Consolidated Report”.

Two key issues were highlighted as critical to achieving a strong and effective Aboriginal child and family system that can address the current over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people entering out-of-home care:

1. A comprehensive and well-resourced Aboriginal workforce strategy that is driven by government and Aboriginal organisations; and
2. An Aboriginal Cultural Framework established to deliver support services.

The report included consultations from twelve workshops, with close to a hundred participants who were involved in the Aboriginal child and family system, from across NSW metropolitan and regional areas. It is divided into two parts, namely: reform impact on the workforce and implementation mechanisms to address workforce planning, and development.

This report highlights the over-arching issues and challenges being experienced by organisation and individuals in the child and family service sector.

Contextualising Workplace Development within the Aboriginal Child and Family sector

For context, service system issues were identified in the report. A central tenet across programmatic and people issues was the need for cultural awareness as part of **working towards an Aboriginal driven cultural framework** for the Aboriginal children and families.

Programmatic-level issues:

The report identified a need for **strategic workforce planning, development and assessment by government**. The government needs to show equal commitment to the child and family sector as that shown to the national taskforces such as Aged Care and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). There is a need for efficiency measures to standardise processes such as commissioning to support providers, and initiatives to assess and

redesign the Aboriginal child and family service model. Part of this is looking to attract an Aboriginal workforce and ensure remuneration and incentives are adequate.

The **reform agenda** is destabilising the sector, with a sense of unrealistic expectations on providers to change without adequate transitional support. In addition, the **funding now and in the future** and **commissioning** constraints, such as short term funding arrangements, bring uncertainty and instability that directly affect the service outcomes for children and families. It also disadvantages smaller and specialised Aboriginal service providers.

People based issues:

There is a **competitive child and family services workforce environment** partly from the limited local workforce, especially in remote areas. This results in competing for staff within the sector, spreading into related and taskforce resource industries such as aged care and NDIS. The reforms bring forth **partnership** opportunities such as data and best practice sharing measures, along with **internship** and **volunteering** opportunities that can strengthen collaborative and sector wide coordination, particularly with Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs).

Educational requirements present both opportunities and barriers for building the workforce for specialised Aboriginal child and family service providers. While tertiary education is key to a highly capable workforce, there is a need for greater recognition of transferable skills, knowledge and experience to provide opportunities for skilled applicants who do not possess the formal qualifications. This includes assessment processes that recognise lived experience and provide pathways to education.

The **impact of other industry stakeholders**, and requirements around mandatory reporting and employment eligibility screening, was noted to deter prospective workers and impact on the retention of current Aboriginal workers. Accessible and timely **employment documentation** systems can support Aboriginal people to gain the necessary identity documents that would help address a key barrier for them to enter the sector.

Working towards a Strategy

Workplace development and planning is often explored through four phases: attraction, recruitment, retention and upskilling. The report identified the issues and opportunities that can help enhance the workforce capabilities and promote employment opportunities within the Aboriginal child and family sector. Common themes emerged across the four phases, and have been listed as domains that are critical to a successful workforce development strategy.

The domains included:

- **Cultural Equity, Inclusion** and considerations that frame how the sector approaches working with Aboriginal children and families. These key terms need to be defined by Aboriginal people themselves. There is a need to review **organisational culture and management** so that they act in a culturally appropriate and culturally safe manner, and are flexible and responsive to support the Aboriginal workforce. This includes having a Sorry Business Policy that reflects an understanding of the meaning of family and community obligations as well as kinship relationships for Aboriginal staff.
- **Employment conditions and remuneration** need to include flexibility for Aboriginal workers, childcare support, remuneration incentives, flexible work arrangements and housing assistance. There is a need to recognise the impact on Aboriginal workers of working and living within their communities. There is an expectation, from their communities, that the worker is available around the clock, impacting their ability to have a work-life balance. Practical tools need to be provided to staff by their employers, particularly for Aboriginal workers, how to maintain their own personal reputation separate from the organisational issues when living and working in their communities. In addition, there is a need to recognise the competitive market for Aboriginal organisations to retain staff and reduce their leaving for higher paid roles.

- Concerns for **workload and caseload** were raised as an issue, due to the under-resourcing and state of the sector. This has meant staff had to “hit the ground running” leaving limited opportunities for Aboriginal staff to obtain the necessary skills and procedures relevant to the industry. The need to redesign client staff ratios to alleviate the pressures on workers from the system-based failures were mentioned.
- Adequate and flexible **clinical supervision, performance management and practice support** are critical to address the secondary trauma compounded for Aboriginal workers who are more intimately connected to the social and inter-generational trauma associated with the work. Ideally, clinical supervision is supported by **cultural supervision and mentoring** that allow for culturally safe spaces and informal interactions to support and retain Aboriginal workers in the sector.
- **Professional development** and **training** along with **recruitment design, screening and selection** can address the perceived unfair, inequitable and inaccessible nature of the recruitment process for Aboriginal people. One notable suggestion was to develop an **Aboriginal specific agency**, which streamlines the recruitment processes, and creates a shared talent pool to service the Aboriginal child and family sector. This will help recognise attributes and experiences that Aboriginal people have instead of focusing on formal qualifications only. **Leadership opportunities** were also noted as a means to help Aboriginal people overcome professional isolation and develop strong networks.
- Along with a framework, that addresses cultural equity, inclusion and considerations, a **marketing and branding** strategy can help address the negative reputation of working in the sector. Organisations and agencies should use **community engagement and partnerships** to strengthen and promote their presence within their communities.

Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy

Workforce Development – Consolidated Report

Introduction

The Workforce Development Project (Project) was undertaken to develop local workforce plans, along with a district and state-wide strategy, to strengthen the Aboriginal Child and Family workforce to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities. The Project included consultations with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal non-government organisations about their workforce needs in relation to four key areas — *Attracting, Recruiting, Retaining and Upskilling the workforce*. The consultations examined the challenges experienced in the aforementioned four key areas, and any strategies found to be successful in overcoming those challenges.

This *Workforce Development – Consolidated Report* outlines the key themes from 12 workshops, and contributes to an overarching state-wide strategy to drive workforce development in the Aboriginal Child and Family sector.

Background

The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Industry Development Strategy was developed in 2017, in consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), peaks and communities. Its aim was to identify investment needs and the actions required to develop the capacity of Aboriginal services across NSW, in order to build a state-wide Aboriginal service safety net. The strategy included three core themes:

- 1 Increase the scale and capacity of the Aboriginal workforce
- 2 Provide access to support in response to integrated and person directed service models
- 3 Clear accountability for outcomes

The strategy, now referred to as the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (ACFIS) focuses on five priority areas:

- 1 Ensure state-wide service coverage
- 2 Support existing capacity to reach scale and maturity to deliver quality services
- 3 Enhance current workforce capabilities and promote employment opportunities
- 4 Target supports to assist organisations through periods of rapid growth or change
- 5 Measure outcomes and share knowledge

The Workforce Development Project

Project objectives, scope and deliverables

Consistent with ACFIS's Priority Area 3 to "enhance current workforce capabilities and promote employment opportunities in the sector", the Workforce Development Project's objective is to support ACCOs to develop locally directed workforce plans as well as a state-wide workforce strategy.

The Project targets the needs of the Aboriginal Child and Family sector, and aligns with ongoing reforms including the Permanency Support Program (PSP) and Targeted Early Intervention (TEI). The project is commissioned by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ – formerly Family and Community Services (FACS)), under the Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy.

The Project aims to:

- Understand the workforce implications of the reform and develop locally appropriate approaches to recruitment, professional development, staff support, and future workforce development;
- Target supports to contribute to a state-wide strategy, while understanding locally specific challenges;
- Design policies, procedures or initiatives that are matched to a local plan; and
- Access local solutions to professional development.

To deliver on these aims, the Project seeks to:

- Explore and establish the common workforce skills and skill-gaps in the Aboriginal sector by identifying the job families in the child and family sector;
- Review recent documents, including from PSP, consultants, and DCJ's capability frameworks;
- Support the development of locally directed workforce plans by identifying the level of understanding of workforce planning and elements;
- Engage other stakeholders to further inform the plans through working with local learning and development industries
- Develop a district workforce strategy
- Develop a state-wide workforce strategy, aligned with workforce strategies proposed under PSP and TEI reforms
- Develop resources, where possible, including templates for the development of workforce strategies to assist organisations to develop their own individualised workforce plans

Context

Aboriginal children and young people continue to be over-represented in the NSW child protection system. In 2017/18, 37% of those entering out-of-home care (OOHC) were Aboriginal children and young people. And when compared to all children and young people in OOHC, the overall percentage of Aboriginal children in OOHC was 38%. Aboriginal children are 11 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal peers¹.

Workforce development is one aspect to address this inequality and achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people and their families, across the continuum of child and family services.



¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019) Child Protection Australia Report 2017-18

In addition to better meeting the current needs of the sector, workforce development strategies must take into account future projections of sector needs. For example, according to *Family Matters Report*, it is estimated that the number of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home-care may triple by 2035². This figure highlights the importance of continuing to attract and train potential workers, to further build capacity into the Aboriginal child and family service sector. This would ensure that there will be a trained and ready workforce to connect with, support and strengthen, vulnerable families and communities, as needed.

AbSec Approach

Project Governance

The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (ACFIS) is governed by a project control group consisting of the Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ) and AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation. Meetings are held quarterly.

The Project Methodology

A limited desktop literature review was conducted on workforce issues in the child and family services sector and other relevant reforms such as the Targeted Earlier Intervention and the Permanency Support Program.

Other supporting information was gathered to assist with workforce planning:

- Identification of job families, roles and job descriptions from sources such as the Community Services Taleo and NSW Human Services; identification of the industries with most regular connections and touchpoints with the Aboriginal child and family services sector; and,
- Development of a survey to further gather and test information from current employees of the child and family sector about what they consider impedes Aboriginal employment opportunities.

Twelve workshops were held across NSW, with attendees from a mix of child and family service providers.

The twelve workshop locations included Bathurst, Bega, Broken Hill, Campbelltown, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Lismore, Nowra, Sydney LGA, Tamworth, Wagga Wagga and Wyong.

Documentation that supported the workshops

Potential workforce pool for Aboriginal child and family services

NSW Australian Bureau of Statistics Data 2016, showed that there is an increase in attainment, qualifications and workforce participation of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 64 years, with the primary employment industry being within the health care and social assistance sectors³. This indicates a potential workforce pool for the Aboriginal child and family services, if the recommended strategies are implemented.



Post-school qualification 45% of the population 15 years old and older⁴

Higher level qualification attainment 16% of 20 to 64 year olds⁵ diploma or above

Labour Force Participation 54.4% of the population 15 years and older⁶

2 Family Matters Report 2016

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Census: Industry, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/midiareleasesbyReleaseDate/142C08A784A1B5C0CA2581BF001EE22C?OpenDocument>

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Census of Population and Housing. Unpublished data from Tablebuilder

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) Census of Population and Housing, available at: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/Abs@.Nsf/Latestproducts/2076.0Main%20Features412016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=2076.0&issue=2016&num=&view=>

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) NSW Census Community Profiles: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Profile

Table 1 illustrates the different industries and job families, job function/category and job roles needed to provide children, young people and their families with integrated responses to their needs. The table supported the approach to inform participants of the continuum of care and services for children and young people, and more importantly, identify workforce entry points and career progression into and across Aboriginal child and family services. It was noted by participants that Justice was not included in the table – which, unfortunately, is an agency that is prominent in the lives of many Aboriginal children and youth in OOHc.

TABLE 1 Child and Family service sector workforce

CLIENTS	Aboriginal Children, Young People, Families and Communities										
INDUSTRY	Child, Youth and Family Services										
WORKFORCE	Prevention and Early Intervention		Child Protection		Out-of-home care	Business Enablers	Carers	Specialist Health	Allied Health	Education	Justice
	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families	Job Families
	Job Function										
	Job Category										
	Job Roles										
WORKFORCE PLANNING & STRATEGY	Skills, Training & Qualification review										
	Current, Future and Gaps										
	Attraction, Recruitment Retention										
GOVERNANCE REGULATORS	Aboriginal & Non Aboriginal providers										
	AbSec										
	State Government FACS/DCJ; OCG and Ombudsman										
	Commonwealth										

Table 2 identified the common job families and or roles across programs, initiatives or support services with touch points to the Aboriginal child and family services sector across the continuum of care for child, youth and family services. Humans Services NSW reflects only 10 job families or roles in DCJ.

TABLE 2

SUPPORT SERVICE AREA	JOB, FAMILY AND/OR ROLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Target Earlier Intervention (Incl. Parenting supports) » Out-of-home care » Brighter Futures » Intensive Family Services (Inc. IFBS, Intensive Family Preservation » Multisystemic Therapy MST and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) » Restoration » Intensive Therapeutic Care » Leaving Care / After Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Aboriginal Caseworker » Caseworker » Permanency Coordinator » Casework Manager » Casework Support Worker » Chief Executive Officer/General Manager » Facility Manager » Human Resource/Finance Operation » Manager » Allied Health specialist » Specialist medical



Table 3 was presented to participants at the workshop to visualise the conversation and process for review. It helped structure the workforce planning discussions on the themes, opportunities, challenges, gaps and focus, to identify actions, strategies and initiatives.

TABLE 3

JOB FAMILY Group	JOB ROLE	OPPORTUNITIES What are the opportunities for your organisation?	FOCUS What areas are critical?	ACTIONS/ STRATEGIES INITIATIVES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Prevention and Early Intervention » Target Earlier Intervention (Incl. parenting supports) » Brighter Futures » Intensive Family Support / Intensive Family » Preservation » Intensive Family Based Services » MST/FFT » Restoration » Intensive Therapeutic Care » Leaving Care/ After Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Aboriginal Caseworker » Caseworker » Permanency Coordinator » Casework Manager » Casework Support Worker » CEO/General Manager » Facility Manager » HR/Finance Operation » Allied Health professional » Specialist » Volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase the Aboriginal workforce » Create innovative ways to develop skills » Employment opportunities particularly in NSW remote and rural areas » Career pathways across the continuum of care and service delivery in CFS » Build stronger partnerships 	<p>Jobs</p> <hr/> <p>Skills/ attributes</p> <hr/> <p>Qualifications</p> <hr/> <p>Locations</p> <hr/> <p>Review skills requirements</p>	<p>Policy/ practice/ procedural reform</p>	
		<p style="text-align: center;">CHALLENGES What are the challenges for your organisation?</p>	<p>Strengthen Workforce partnerships</p> <hr/> <p>Map pathways to upskill internal and external staff</p> <hr/> <p>Key supports for Aboriginal staff</p>		<p>Organisational structure</p>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increase in early intervention and child protection of Aboriginal children and young people. » Maintain adequate service provision in rural and remote areas » Attract, Recruit, Retain a skilled and locally connected Aboriginal workforce in a expanding sector » Support the current workforce to build skills and capabilities required to adapt to reforms » Competition with other care services for skilled/qualified Aboriginal workers ie Health, Aged and Disability services. 			
				<p>Partnerships</p>	

Who we heard from

Ninety-five participants attended the workshops, representing 57 organisations who provided information and advice on workforce issues affecting their services across NSW. All workshop participants provided insight and made valuable contributions. The responses were collected in an anonymised format.

Workforce consultation

The consultations were designed to capture and respect the diverse experiences of Aboriginal people and communities, and issues related to service delivery in regional and remote areas, while identifying key themes across the sector.

First participants were provided with an overview of some of the issues facing Aboriginal people in the sector.

- The motivation for people wanting or not wanting to enter, leave or who had left the workforce – (supply and demand)
- identifying the gaps or barriers that impedes individuals to achieve the tasks of their role (capability) and then consolidating those to formulate solutions to increase workforce capacity, and
- look at organisations’ approaches to meet objectives, now and into the future (organisation and environment assessments)

The consultations encouraged participants to share practical solutions and strategies to address their workforce needs, identify the strengths and opportunities from their local region, as well as collaborate and develop new initiatives to overcome systemic issues.

Issues were explored from a strength-based perspective, rather than focusing only on existing deficits. Information gathered was through an inductive approach to data collection, increasing opportunity to generate meaning and identify relationships between findings.



Summary of findings

In general, participants responded positively to the discussions. While we found the feedback from the workshops to be overall fairly consistent, there were obvious differences based on whether their organisation was located in a metropolitan, regional or remote area and the participants position at the organisation.

Participants consistently identified the importance of a comprehensive, resourced Aboriginal workforce strategy, to be driven across government and Aboriginal organisations, as well as the establishment of an Aboriginal Cultural Framework to support service delivery and achieve a strong and effective Aboriginal child and family system. This was seen as a key element in improving the current over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people entering out-of-home care.

Participants identified themes, gaps, barriers and opportunities that were both unique and or universal to the Aboriginal child and family services sector, and in particular to Aboriginal people, clients, family and communities.

The report discusses the issues identified by participants organised in two key themes; service systems issues and workforce planning and development.

Areas identified by participants under service systems themes are:

- Strategic workforce planning, development and assessment by government
- Reform
- Funding now and in the future
- Commissioning
- Educational Streams
- Competitive Child and Family services workforce environment
- Partnership
- Working in Aboriginal communities
- Volunteering
- Impact of other industry stakeholders
- Employment documentation

Under workforce planning and development participants subsequently identified a number of consistent domains of workforce development and also identified domains that are critical to the Child and Family Service industry.

The domains identified were:

- Cultural Equity/Inclusion/Considerations (Participants advised that Aboriginal people need to define the varying definitions)
- Organisation Culture & Management
- Community Engagement & Partnerships
- Recruitment design, screening and selection
- Professional Development
- Training
- Leadership
- Employment conditions and Remuneration
- Workload/caseload
- Clinical Supervision/Performance management/Practice Supports
- Marketing and Branding

It became apparent that workforce development had not been a focus area for targeted discussion. This led to a broader discussion that included workforce development, planning and assessment. However, the discussions did touch on the intended exploratory areas of workforce development, in particular at a quantitative and qualitative level. Therefore, a number of high level recommendations have been collated and put into a draft state-wide strategy for further discussion with government.

Across NSW, participants discussed the external drivers of workforce demand, which warranted special mention as these issues can impact on quality, efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and program design. These issues have been clustered using the PESTLE model⁷, which looks at political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors in a Child and Family service environment.



Service System Issues

Strategic workforce planning, development and assessment

Strategic workforce planning, development and assessment was supported by participants, and for many were viewed as priorities. Participants felt that governments at the state and federal levels lacked foresight and commitment to the child and family sector, in particular its workforce, in comparison to high profile industries who received a national taskforce to support industries such as Aged Care – Aged Care Workforce Strategy Taskforce, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – The NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce.

Participants expressed that non-government organisations (NGOs) in the child and family service sector were also impacted by the same global issue as other human services industries, in the areas of qualification and skill sets, career progression, educational pathways, and remoteness. Ongoing issues associated with the perception of past and present practices on Aboriginal people and communities were also identified as key factors.

Throughout the consultation, there was a call for a standard approach to workforce planning across the different forms of services delivered by child and family services, including a staff to client ratio and an effort formula. Participants expressed that the current lack of a formula affected an organisation’s efficiency and effectiveness in providing care and services to clients. Moving forward, it was suggested that a formula could better support DCJ in commissioning as well as support those providers operating in OOHC services to improve their compliance.

Participants highlighted that the job roles and functions have been static in Aboriginal child and family services, and have not been reassessed or redesigned to reflect the reform agendas. They noted that funding bodies don’t consider workforce planning at a local level, which in turn impacts on service delivery, safety, and quality for staff and clients. Participants said that the desired outcomes in Aboriginal child and family services will not be achieved without a real commitment to review, assess and redesign all job roles aligned to the models of current and future care and service needs of Aboriginal clients.

Parity of pay was raised by participants as one contributing factor for workforce instability due to the different awards, pay levels and conditions (e.g. SCHADS, Crown and enterprise bargaining), whilst carrying out the same duties, in the same location and for clients with the same care and service needs.

⁷ Pestle Analysis, see: <https://pestleanalysis.com/what-is-pestle-analysis/>

Reform agenda

Participants raised concerns about the reform agenda, such as the regulatory reporting and changes to industry practices overlaid by timeframes in the divestment of OOHC and early intervention services from DCJ to the NGO sector. The minimal and ad hoc funding impacts an organisation's ability to carry out genuine workforce development.

Many participants commented that the reform agenda of governments can deter new applicants and destabilise the existing workforce of smaller organisations, by placing unrealistic expectations on them to quickly adapt to new ways of delivering services with little meaningful support. They felt that the government has not understood the impacts of ongoing reforms, including immediate changes to service delivery, alongside requirements to understand the new reform, and upskill appropriately.

The general view is that incoming governments change commitments without looking at the impacts those changes have on service delivery i.e. contractual and funding repercussions leading to job loss and instability. One example provided in the consultation by Aboriginal participants from a large organisation was that the reform agenda was given as the reason for the closure of their Aboriginal unit, which also destabilised their entire Aboriginal workforce and services to their clients.

Funding now and future

A major concern for participants across all locations (and a majority of the organisations represented) was the uncertainty of funding, and the impacts of this uncertainty on the morale of staff and their clients. Participants noted that workforce and service stability is important to meeting the needs of service users, particularly as it takes time to build relationships and trust.

An observation was that most organisations appeared to be in a reactive mode, due to lack of frontline and specialist staff. Many participants commented that short-term funding contracts creates uncertainty for current and potential staff. In addition, programs funded as service packages (such as Permanency Support Program) do not support long-term workforce development and capacity building, given the current uncertainty in package numbers. To grow the workforce, participants noted that the funding model must allow flexibility and innovation, to enable organisations to build capacity to effectively meet existing and future needs.

There was a view that funding is mainly directed to large non-Aboriginal organisations with a general service delivery record. Further to this, participants spoke of tokenistic Aboriginal employment practices across the sector to fill roles identified for Aboriginal people and to gain access to funding. Some participants expressed a view that non-Aboriginal organisations gain funding without seeking to improve their cultural competency or strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal communities or engage with other local Aboriginal service providers.

Commissioning

Participants felt that smaller organisations will be at a disadvantage due to a limited understanding of the commissioning approach and the new requirement for evidence-based performance, reporting on outcomes rather than outputs. Overall, participants felt that competitive bidding for funding will have a negative impact on smaller and specialised Aboriginal service providers.

Participants raised the need for a transparent formula of staff to client ratio and an effort formula which is created through DCJ consulting with the sector.

Participants felt that before contractual agreements are executed there should be a process that requires organisations to demonstrate how it will employ Aboriginal people and provide evidence of a base level of cultural awareness.

Education streams

In general, participants raised that the tertiary education system, including vocational education and training (VET), higher education and registered training organisations (RTO), is a key to developing a highly capable workforce and increasing job opportunities. However, there is a need for portability and recognition of transferable skills, knowledge and experience across industries. The current system contributes both to depriving opportunities to skilled applicants who did not possess formal qualifications, as well as accelerating the advancement of those with formal qualifications beyond their skill development, creating feelings of being overwhelmed by demands and leading to burnout and poor outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.

Participants also noted that a focus on qualifications rather than skills contributed to the strong sense of a discriminatory system, which impacts on perceptions of the sector and organisations.

Participants felt that qualifications are disproportionately weighted in the hiring processes, without sufficient consideration of applied knowledge and the development of practical skills and experience. This was exacerbated by the imposition of external child and family service programs and models, which may include stringent qualification requirements that are not based on the needs of Aboriginal children and families.

Participants stated the educational streams, including relevant regulators, need to work with local communities and industries to identify what training and qualifications are required to meet the needs of local industries. The process must recognise an individual's skills and competencies and develop an assessment process that recognises lived experiences. The process must also develop a smoother pathway from school, vocational and higher education, and provide access to practical experience, workplace training or traineeships during senior school. The approach should be balanced, focusing on building skills, expertise and other key attributes.

Participants agreed that it was important to raise the profile of Aboriginal and child and family services with education providers, and identify the locations that require a boost in workforce numbers and skills and support.

Competitive Child and Family services workforce environment

Participants stated child and family services is a competitive environment. However, they acknowledged the industry, in particular the NGO sector, needs to work more collaboratively in order to improve outcomes for clients. In regional locations, organisations were worried that they could be viewed as 'poaching' potential and current employees from other providers. Similarly, this competitiveness spanned into a number of related industries, including aged care, disability services, health, and justice. This concern demonstrates the sense of thin local workforce resources and the urgent need to strengthen pathways to grow the Aboriginal child and family workforce across all roles.



The group discussions focused on how to share staff with specialised knowledge or skills across areas of high demand. Participants suggested establishing a sector mechanism to record job swaps, transfers, and relief work, in order to achieve an agile and coordinated local workforce. This would improve the opportunity for Aboriginal communities to respond effectively to changes in need, service investment or other reforms.

Another suggestion was the establishment of an Aboriginal specific agency to act as a single point of contact and streamlining the recruitment process, including interviews and assessment of potential employees in the Aboriginal child and family space. This agency could work in partnership with local organisations to establish a shared talent pool as part of local Aboriginal community-controlled designed and administrated service system. Participants felt that such an approach might have other benefits, including the prevention of staff burn-out, and enable positions to be backfilled on short notice.

Partnership

General discussions looked at the need for partnerships to be aligned to the current reforms. Participants commented that local Aboriginal child and family services and other related service providers caring for the same families don't share data or best practice.

Participants said that many government agencies are keen to engage with and request assistance from ACCO's regarding Aboriginal matters, but do not fund these initiatives. This places a significant burden on staff within Aboriginal services (including Aboriginal child and family services). Participants felt these initiatives were important in delivering improved services to Aboriginal children, families and communities, but weren't being appropriately valued in funding and resourcing decisions, with the burden falling on already under-resourced Aboriginal communities.

Participants noted that there was a lack of consistency among funded agencies in relation to their core business and service stream. This impacted clients' understanding of service delivery, and organisations' ability to establish partnerships. Participants emphasised the importance of a coordinated approach to Aboriginal service delivery, which is not adequately fostered through existing funding and procurement practices. This creates a disjointed experience for families seeking support. A different approach to local service system design and investment, led by Aboriginal communities themselves, was suggested in order to achieve improved partnership and coordination for Aboriginal families.

An example of a collaborative and holistic partnership was through services co-locating. Participants noted that this could allow ease in communication, establishment of rapport, and streamlining effective service delivery. As mentioned above, the development of talent pools and local employment collectives, would also demonstrate effective partnerships.

Participants used the partnership example of a community service centre providing internships and placements through local universities and organisations to attract the right fit for available jobs.

Working towards an Aboriginal driven cultural framework

Within a non-Aboriginal service system, participants noted that Aboriginal practitioners and other Aboriginal staff were expected to engage and work with *all* Aboriginal clients, with an assumption that the Aboriginal staff member is the organisations' cultural expert. There was agreement among Aboriginal participants that universal "Aboriginal cultural experts" do not exist, and individual Aboriginal workers must not be expected to take on this role.

"We are not your black Google"

Participant Quote

Aboriginal participants, in particular, felt there was a need to develop a united approach from Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations, Aboriginal units in the Aboriginal child and family services sector, and Aboriginal peak bodies. These organisations needed to collaborate and form an agreement on the interpretation and definition of the current use of terms describing the levels of cultural awareness, inclusion, safety and proficiency.

Aboriginal participants mentioned the approach needs to be in the form of a framework, strategy, or principle that looks at cultural inclusion and safety. The process needs to review all aspects that can contribute to disparate outcomes including policy, practices, perceptions, racism, biases, inequity across workplace culture, and the needs of Aboriginal people, families and communities with touch points to Aboriginal child and family services.

Participants stressed that the framework needs to be developed to ensure that Aboriginal culture is imbued throughout the Aboriginal child and family services sector. It must be developed and agreed to by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, to ensure integrity and respect.

“As Aboriginal people, we need to find our feet and our voice to meet our own needs. We need to empower Aboriginal communities to care for our children and families and ourselves. Colonisation has broken this down”

Participant Quote

Volunteering

Participants explored the importance of volunteers within the Aboriginal child and family sector. Participants noted that volunteer approaches may provide an opportunity to build job skills and may act as a pathway to employment. Participants acknowledged the importance of key safeguards including Working With Children Checks (WWCC) to ensure the safety of Aboriginal children and families engaging with services, and identified that strengthening volunteerism through more established structures might assist in attracting additional workers to the sector.

“Volunteers can help build up community confidence and trust”.

Participant Quote

Impact of other industry stakeholders

Throughout the consultation, participants raised the lack of clarity around the role and responsibility of DCJ, OCG and Ombudsman, particularly relating to capacity building activities.

Participants noted the need for consistent employment screening processes, including Working with Children Check (WWCC) and criminal checks (police checks), and sharing of information regarding prospective employees (for example through section 16A of the Privacy Act 1988), in promoting a safe and accountable child and family workforce.

Participants mentioned that the current WWCC and criminal checks process can create bias to young people or adults who were in the OOHC system as their records will be used to inform the WWCC and criminal checks. This in

Workforce Development and Planning

To further explore skills and gaps of the Aboriginal Child and Family workforce, responses were separated to align directly with elements and stages of workforce development, including:

- Attraction
- Recruitment
- Retention
- Upskilling

Attraction

Issues facing Aboriginal people wanting to enter the Aboriginal child and family sector workforce was discussed with participants. Participants acknowledged that the issues were not generally at the forefront when designing the job role or description for advertising or screening candidates. The issues that arose from the discussion could be clustered into domains of cultural capability, marketing and branding, and remuneration incentives.

Perception and Experience

Participants discussed the reasons why Aboriginal people may have formed a negative perception (in general) of child and family services and shared their insights of the statutory system both past and present practices through the lens of lived and communities' experiences. At the front of mind were recent government legislative changes that concerned communities. Participants identified these factors and the continual negative media coverage as contributing to the reluctance of Aboriginal people to consider employment in the sector. Some Aboriginal participants mentioned that Aboriginal child and family services is perceived in community as "not a safe environment for Aboriginal people to work in".

Participants acknowledged a need for a positive campaign targeted to Aboriginal people to work in child and family services that respectfully acknowledges past practices and, empowers and encourages people to work in the child and family sector however, sensitively balancing this campaign against current practices.

Participants noted that there currently is very little media coverage supporting the positive outcomes child and family services achieved, which may be due to the privacy and sensitively.

Reputation, marketing, branding and advertising

Participants viewed the reputation of an organisation to be key in recognising good practices based on a number of areas, support given to Aboriginal staff, engagement and outcomes of clients and community. The areas participants looked for in an organisation, were recognition of Sorry Business, cultural competency training, and culturally appropriate engagement with Aboriginal children, young people, Elders and the general community. Participants mentioned that an organisation's good reputation with local communities and the experience of their Aboriginal employees can be a key factor in increasing their Aboriginal workforce.

"Word of mouth is invaluable, it can provide a lot of informal chatter about an organisation and the experience of Aboriginal employees"

Participant Quote

A number of participants across different locations mentioned that working in the Aboriginal child and family services space can ruin your reputation, and adversely affect family and community relationships. A few Aboriginal participants said for this reason, they would not encourage family members to work in the Aboriginal child and family sector.

Participants discussed what they felt could be the cause for these perceptions. Not understanding the legal requirements of their role, not having enough time for case practice updates, high caseloads, job creep, burn out, stress and urgent backfilling. These issues have pigeonholed child and family services as a challenging field, resulting in high turn-over of Aboriginal staff that can erode community trust in the organisation.

Participants stressed that an organisation’s culture plays a significant role in its ability to attract staff. There was a view that most attraction and recruiting campaigns were mainly developed by a non-Aboriginal person within their agency.

Participants also mentioned that Aboriginal child and family services are perceived only in association with child protection and OOHC. This deters potential applicants from other areas of child and family services. Participants noted the potential benefits of a positive and empowering marketing campaign to support the continuum of care across Aboriginal child and family services.

Participants felt that there are opportunities to rebrand the industry, acknowledging past practices with Aboriginal people and encouraging better relationships that could lead to assisting in attracting and recruiting an Aboriginal workforce.

“The Aboriginal child and family services industry comes from a deficit based approach, we need to change this to be positive and empower Aboriginal communities by rebranding, change job descriptions and advocate for Aboriginal people”
Participant Quote

“FACS model of attracting is not conducive to good practice”
Participant Quote

“All areas lack cultural nous”
Participant Quote

Financial Constraints, Housing and Child Care

Participant discussed financial barriers to joining the workforce, and how incentives could assist in breaking these down. One issue was financial constraints to gaining required qualifications. One participant mentioned that the Job Active program is operating again, offering those eligible a \$1000 incentive payment and a trial period to see if they are a good fit for the job. This was discussed as an effective incentive method.

Barriers with housing were also discussed, as participants pointed out that Aboriginal people need support to secure suitable accommodation, in order to secure a job. Some suggestions covered the use of the Aboriginal Housing Office, Employment Related Assistance Homes (ERA), and NGO agencies using available Australian Taxation Office (ATO) incentives.

Another concern, was the absence of child care for potential workforce members. A suggestion put forward was those agencies that had the capacity and capability, could establish in-house child care, playgroups and early child education to assist in meeting this need.

Entry pathways



Participants acknowledged barriers for some Aboriginal people with no formal qualifications, entry level qualifications or not having the right competencies to perform specific roles. Participants raised concerns that a cohort of potential staff were missing out on jobs that could be performed if the role, description, and skills requirements were redesigned to put more emphasis on attributes. Participants acknowledged that child and family services need to reform its qualifications and skills sets to match the needs of the industry, supported by regulators in the service system.

Participants said more work is needed to identify the soft entry pathways into the system and build partnerships, including transitioning workers from other roles within the organisation or sector (for example, supporting administration workers to transition to child and family service delivery roles). Examples of partnerships provided by participants were Parents as Teachers (PAT), Western Division and IPath Southern division.

One participant noted that the inclusion of cadetships or traineeships within organisations will allow increased opportunity for training of entry-level workers with positive attitudes. Participants noted that all soft-entry and career pathway roles required capacity for employees to 'buddy' or 'shadow' experienced workers, in addition to attending standard training courses. For potential employees with previous experience, this may increase the recognition and transferability of pre-existing expertise and knowledge, to support the development of a task-specific skill base. Partnerships with secondary and tertiary institutions were recommended to provide placements and potential pathways for individuals to develop relevant skills and experience. Schools were acknowledged as a great source of potential staff.

As well as creating a soft-entry pathway, supporting Aboriginal child and family services to approach high schools could possibly change the reputation of Aboriginal child and family services. Participants advocated for workplaces to talk to school students and encourage them to look at job roles. They felt it may encourage the education system to be up-to-date with current and future needs of the child and family sector by keeping informed about relevant topics. For this to be done appropriately, agencies whose role and responsible it is to effect change need to visit communities to review missing skills and employee qualities.

Transport

Participants acknowledged that transport was a major issue in rural and remote areas, due to financial burdens and accessibility and availability of vehicles. Specifically, lack of public transport in country areas was noted as a considerable issue, alongside barriers to gaining a licence. This further impacted an individual's ability to access required documentation, certifications, qualifications and knowledge about the Aboriginal child and family sector or job vacancies.

For example, candidates simply attending an interview may need to travel over a 100kms from their place of residence, and then may need to find accommodation because they had missed the local community bus.

Participants covered a range of issues relating to their own experiences in delivering services to clients and the impacts for some clients who do not have access to transport to attend services. For example, a parent that needs to travel to have a scheduled drug test, needs transport. A further concern was maintaining the welfare and wellbeing of employees who were continuously travelling or travelling long distances.

Transport was acknowledged as a deterrent in some communities for students to study at TAFE or university, regardless of their location (e.g. metropolitan, regional or remote regions). There is a misconception that all students have access to free, reliable travel that can fit within their studies, which highlighted those same barriers for someone just starting work. Some participants mentioned that Centrelink means-testing puts added financial pressure on parents to support students to gain higher education or skills especially in regional and remote areas.

Opportunities

Participants offered solutions to address the barriers identified for Aboriginal people wanting to join the Aboriginal child and family services workforce.

These solutions are:

- **Incentives**
 - » Financial assistance using ATO benefits
 - » Housing assistance
 - » Child care support
 - » Use of flexible work arrangements
- **Marketing**
 - » Develop a positive media campaign to assist in breaking down the current reputation of the Aboriginal child and family services sector
 - » Promote Aboriginal child and family services sector as the employer of choice
 - » Promote the sector through recruitment agencies, Aboriginal peak bodies and interagency meetings
 - » Target attraction strategies to students
- **Create partnerships and community engagement days**
 - » Information day "bring your resume"
 - » Information sessions with community
 - » Build trust for workers and community participants in activities that are meaningful to the Aboriginal child and family services sector
 - » Participate in interagency "peer group"
 - » Establish volunteer and mentoring program for people in the community, including people previously in the system

Recruitment

Challenges in recruitment included assessment and selection processes, which may not be well-aligned to identifying skilled Aboriginal workers. Participants discussed efforts to address these processes and issues of systemic bias.

Recruitment process

Participants said the recruitment process was unduly weighed towards qualifications and did not generally value the attributes, experience and skills of Aboriginal people. Prioritisation of formal qualifications and the use of assessment tools that are not appropriate to Aboriginal candidates contributed to a recruitment process that was often seen as unfair, inequitable, and inaccessible to Aboriginal people, particularly those without formal qualifications.

Participants widely agreed that potential staff were deterred by the requirement for cover letters, followed by lengthy waiting periods. Interviews requiring individuals to 'talk themselves up' ruled out potential employees who were reserved or nervous, resulting in applicants feeling they were unsuitable for the position. Participants advocated for a review of the current recruitment process, with a move towards identification of personal traits, attitudes, attributes and cultural fit within the organisation.

Most participants agreed the position descriptions were overly prescriptive and the application is predominately accessible through online portals. Participants mentioned the change in commissioning pushed organisations into using recruitment services, further exacerbating the issues noted above regarding qualifications and appropriate assessment of skills and experience. A majority of participants shared that recruiting was primarily done by a non-Aboriginal person within their organisations. Further, some participants mentioned that their organisation was not funded for an Aboriginal identified position and for the cost to advertise vacancies, thus limiting recruitment opportunities.

General challenges with the under-resourcing and current stewardship of the sector conferred a sense of crisis, requiring staff to be able to "hit the ground running". This requirement for new workers to be able to perform at an already high standard limited the pool of suitable candidates and undermined the opportunity to grow and develop Aboriginal staff within a community context. Participants mentioned the current process may be a suitable short-term solution, but may have the adverse effect of limiting the future pool of potential applicants and employees. As mentioned above, participants were in favour of the creation of soft-entry pathways to recruitment, including student placements, cadetships, and traineeships. Some participants suggested the use of existing job opportunity hubs, including NSWALC or Clontarf Girls Academy.

Selection, screening and design

Participants consistently mentioned that the recruitment process needs reframing to value the attributes and experience of people. For example, life experience (e.g. caring for sick family member as experience for disability support worker role) or connections to community (over just a confirmation of Aboriginality). Participants noted that a number of organisations were already utilising more holistic assessment processes and it was felt that this provided greater opportunity to identify and select valued team members.

Participants said there was a lack of understanding from some organisations of the difference between Identified positions (ratified under Section 14d of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977) and Targeted positions. These positions assist Aboriginal people in gaining employment opportunities and promotes greater cultural competence and safety. Participants agreed that an organisation's human resource leads need to be aware of the processes and legal requirements regarding these positions.

Most Aboriginal people commented that Aboriginal people don't "talk themselves up" in interviews and therefore miss out on employment opportunities. Agencies overlook the candidate due to the weight placed on the individual's performance in interviews. Participants agreed other suitable interview processes need to be identified.



Prescriptive job applications and Position Descriptions not aligning to the job role

Most participants believed that prescriptive job applications and position descriptions did not align to the job role. This was a barrier for potential applicants, particularly since Aboriginal people also have diverse backgrounds. Issues and concerns raised include:

- Job descriptions and classifications did not reflect the current job role, as it was not keeping up with the new models of care and service.
- Inherent assumptions that all job seekers have access to the internet or have effective computer literacy to apply online, as well as scanning and attaching documentation.
- There needs to be a better balance between valuing tertiary qualification, lived experience and attributes in filling jobs.
- Opinion that some organisations deliberately frame job advertisement to restrict the pool of Aboriginal applicants for some positions.

A participant provided an example of an organisation that is working towards employing people with 'lived experience'. The organisation's standard essential criteria required a current driver's licence, although the role did not require driving. To increase the applicant pool, the organisation is working to change the job description away from generic skills and requirements to align it more effectively with job requirements in practice.

Entry level qualifications and meaningful employment

Participants mentioned that most staff (particularly Aboriginal) have entry level qualifications but were overlooked for jobs. This was especially true for jobs requiring higher qualifications, even if the individual had the right attributes. Conversely, participants noted that individuals with formal qualifications may have been hired, but lacked the experience, empathy and skills that were essential to engage Aboriginal communities. As a result, one organisation found that previously engaged families, became disengaged. To mitigate this risk, participants highlighted the importance of valuing lived experience and connection to community.

Induction and on-boarding

Participants mentioned that there is evidence suggesting that providing on-board support for Aboriginal people over an extended period of 3 months has assisted in retaining staff. This included assisting them to deal with the complex issues and pressures of working in and or living in their own community, with Aboriginal people and more generally the experience of being employed.

Bias

In one organisation, a participant noted perceived bias involved in recruitment practices within Aboriginal organisations, where workers with connections to other employees were more likely to be hired.

Other forms of bias was mentioned by participants that related to Aboriginal people having more stringent controls placed on them due to their family name or family connection in the work place. Some felt it was an attack on the workers integrity, unjust and unprofessional.

Diversity Initiatives

Aboriginal participants mentioned attending and participating in regular Aboriginal forums or gatherings such as Sorry Day, NAIDOC, Koori Knockout, and other Aboriginal child focused days, assisted mainstream providers to develop, build and sustain relationships across many Aboriginal services, in particular the Aboriginal child and family services sector. In addition, it also assisted Aboriginal staff to maintain connections.

Aboriginal participants also stated that attending genuine Aboriginal network meeting should be incorporated into HR policy as it assists Aboriginal workers to build relationships and maintain partnerships and share information.

Opportunities

Participants offered solutions to address the barriers identified for Aboriginal people in the recruitment process.

These solutions are:

- Evidential documents
 - » Organisations can provide assistance for potential employees to gain relevant documents or appeal decisions
 - » Design processes to assess relevance of criminal charges, including age at time and the time lapsed.
- Recruitment Process
 - » Ensure job vacancy advertisements are clearly worded and transparent with relevant requirements
 - » Involve Aboriginal people and Elders in the planning of recruitment and recruitment initiatives
 - » Redesign application forms and position descriptions to increase focus on skills, attitude and experience
 - » Develop capability tools to look at unique attributes, skills and experience
 - » Visit communities to meet potential workforce
 - » Increase probation periods to allow potential employees to access required qualifications or training
 - » Provide opportunity for on-the-job-training
- Partnerships
 - » Establish a regional Aboriginal recruitment and retention officer, to support Aboriginal workers and ensure accountability and transparency
 - » Establish a talent pool for potential recruitment
 - » Create program to share and upskill workers among smaller Aboriginal Child and Family organisations

Retention

Discussion of retaining workforce in the Aboriginal child and family focused on the needs of Aboriginal employees, as well as structural issues of sector investment and stewardship. Participants stressed that DCJ must include long-term funding models in order to sustain the current workforce and develop a future workforce.

Remuneration – pay disparities, wages

Across consultation locations, participants raised the issue of disparity in pay and conditions between NGOs and DCJ for the same position and skill base. Participants in some locations, referred to the difference as inequitable, while others felt that it was fostering a discriminative culture. In one location, participants found they were losing experienced staff to DCJ due to pay disparity, although they preferred the NGO workspace. The importance of pay equity in developing a strong Aboriginal child and family workforce across employment settings was emphasised. Wage disparities made it hard for Aboriginal organisations to retain quality staff within a competitive market.

Participants recommended a review of wages across child and family services, supported by the NSW Industry. They noted the complexities in comparable salaries and the difference between an ongoing role and the year-to-year funding administered by DCJ which creates significant uncertainty for Aboriginal organisations and makes it difficult to retain staff.

“Pay disparity is a huge issue, including between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal managers at the same level”

Participant Quote

Leadership

With regards to leadership opportunities, at one workshop location, participants found a general lack of opportunities for further development. Participants mentioned that Aboriginal workers need access to leadership development programs, supported by established and resourced career development pathways. These programs should include opportunities for Aboriginal staff in these roles to network together regularly to provide support across the cohort, sharing best practice and skill development and overcoming issues associated with professional isolation.

Structure and job design

Participants wanted to see position descriptions redesigned to better align with the various job families, centred on each job family’s contribution to the sector and role in meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and families. The redesign should include a review of caseload, client ratios and intensity to clearly identify individual performance. Participants felt that the current process places blame on the worker and not the system failures.

Job levels and qualification disparity across Human services.

Some participants commented on the perceived qualification disparity in Human Services. They also believed that the Aboriginal child and family services sector qualification process is stringent compared to other agencies/governments who deliver social work, such as NSW Health and NDIS. An example raised was a person who could not work in a particular role in Aboriginal child and family services because they did not have the correct qualification; were however able to obtain the same role in NSW Health.

Organisational Cultural Management

Participants agreed that working in Aboriginal child and family services is a challenging role. It was noted that managers must be flexible, responsive, and culturally appropriate, in order to better support the Aboriginal workforce. A common theme was that non-Aboriginal managers need to understand the cultural needs of their Aboriginal staff, to be supportive of Aboriginal workers working in child and family services. Within this discussion, non-Aboriginal managers asked where and how they could gain the cultural knowledge needed to support staff. This demonstrated a clear need for increased availability of Aboriginal cultural education in the workplace.



Participants mentioned that workers can be subjected to lateral violence and feel compromised and conflicted trying to balance cultural obligations with regulatory, legislative and contractual obligations of their employer and funding body. This reflects persistent structural and systemic issues within the statutory child protection system, and the need to address these issues as part of building and retaining the Aboriginal child and family workforce. In addition, it was noted that where there was only one Aboriginal staff member in an office, there was a risk of cultural isolation and marginalisation in the workplace which may lead to exits from the sector. For this reason, they called for the increase in employment of Aboriginal workers and greater opportunities for networking to establish culturally-based communities of practice.

Participants discussed their organisation’s awareness and sensitivity towards Aboriginal culture. This included the creation of a formal Sorry Business policy including additional leave entitlements or access to support services that acknowledges the impact of trauma or the provision of cultural supervision. In addition, participants were supportive of organisational policies, with case-by-case consideration in relation to cultural consideration for approved carers and bereavement leave.

Participants noted that a Sorry Business policy should reflect an understanding of the meaning of family and community obligations, as well as kinship relationships. These aspects have core importance to the contribution of Aboriginal workers within the sector, and should be considered in employment conditions. One organisation explained that their agency expected staff to attend the funerals of Aboriginal community members, as a sign of respect. They are provided with the opportunity to attend in a work vehicle or if they would like to wear a uniform.

Participants noted that employment must not be tokenistic, aligned to meet quotas or targets, but be focused on the important contribution of Aboriginal people in the sector.

Employment Conditions

Participants engaged in lengthy discussions surrounding employment conditions within the Aboriginal child and family sector, focusing on the workload of employees.

Participants said that employers need to recognise and address challenges (both personal and related to Work Health & Safety) faced by their Aboriginal employees, who live and work in their own communities. A common perception within some communities, including from other agencies, the Aboriginal community and friends and family members of a worker, is that Aboriginal workers are available 24/7. This adds pressure and can strain the worker’s ability to maintain an appropriate work-life balance.

Participants mentioned that due to demand and general organisational capacity, work arrangements are often inflexible within this environment. However, Aboriginal employees noted that they often experience a greater effective workload than their non-Aboriginal colleagues, as they become the organisation's representative for all Aboriginal affairs, or are routinely used for case consultation in addition to their general workload. One participant said that their higher workload did not attract extra pay or other entitlements, while another participant had experienced an employer using their identified position as a way to pay them significantly less despite doing the same work as a non-identified worker.

Notably, one participant did not mind their additional responsibilities, as they reported that their colleagues were supportive in sharing and balancing other tasks and responsibilities. This example highlighted the importance of healthy workplace practices. Participants noted that this flexibility should be extended to support workers in maintaining an actual work-life balance alongside professional and community responsibilities, specifically suggesting flexible work hours or the ability to work from home, with access to IT and required business items.

High rates of burnout was discussed at all consultations. A number of participants noted an increase in stress leave, and high staff turnover, due to burnout. A few organisations discussed their management of staff burnout, as offering staff members counselling and strategies to separate home from work, and learning how to say 'no' respectfully.

Clinical Supervision

Participants noted that clinical supervision was critical in the Aboriginal child and family services sector due to the nature of the work and the acknowledgement of workers suffering secondary trauma.

Participants noted inconsistent policies across organisations, regarding accessing confidential and private employment assistance programs. Participants across the consultations noted the importance of clinical supervision and the development of personal learning and development plans. Benefits of clinical supervision included advice, guidance, direction, clarification of role and responsibilities, reduced burnout, and increased confidence for workers.

Further, an 'open-door' policy within organisations, alongside regular supervision, was noted as an effective way for managers to notice early changes in employees. With regular clinical supervision, participants felt that they could work with their manager to proactively address concerns.

Cultural Supervision and Mentoring

Cultural supervision, peer supervision, and mentoring were all discussed separately to clinical supervision as a way of gaining skills and support through informal interactions. This topic was discussed as a clear factor to strengthen Aboriginal worker retention.

For new Aboriginal workers, participants agreed that a designated mentor can provide effective support throughout the induction process, and encouragement could build skills and confidence. Specifically, cultural supervision may support new and existing Aboriginal workers in understanding blurred lines between their family role and work role, as well as cultural obligations and expectations. A concern that arose was the difficulties experienced by workers in trying to navigate and distinguish their cultural obligations within their Aboriginal family nucleus and to support the family or be a community person supporting a family, which can conflict with workplace guidelines and expectations. Some participants mentioned that the lack of clarity can make them feel removed as a family and community member. This also impacts on worker retention.

While some organisations discussed their need to formalise mentoring programs, others expressed that this form of networking within organisations would build mutual respect, and assist in retaining Aboriginal workers.

In one location, participants felt that strong Aboriginal supervisors and mentors could create a culturally safe space for Aboriginal workers to reach out to each other for peer support and debriefing, through open and honest relationships.

Opportunities

Participants offered solutions to address the barriers identified for Aboriginal workers in Aboriginal child and family services. These solutions are:

Remuneration and incentives

- Ensure all areas are equitable: monitor for changes and competitors (i.e. NGO and DCJ)
- NGOs to use incentives to balance wage disparities
- Position description and classification reflect current work and remuneration
- Use housing incentives such as ERA homes
- Use incentives to attract specialist staff

Leadership

- Provide Aboriginal workers access to leadership development programs
- Clearly identify and fund career pathways for Aboriginal people
- Provide Aboriginal child and family service leaders with opportunities to network and collaborate regularly to share best practice and problem solve through an appropriately resourced program

Employment conditions

- Majority of participants supported the need for workforce planning to support their workload, career progression and outcomes for their clients
- Monitor impacts on staff morale, use performance management to support not deter staff and give special attention to clinical supervision
- Ensure the organisation is culturally safe
- Create a yearly allocated self-care leave

Workload

- Develop guideline for staffing ratios to clientele across the different programs or service delivery areas
- Flexible work arrangements and job sharing
- Allowances or salary sacrificing
- Increased use of policies being implemented on an 'as need' basis
- Job sharing between organisations with similar service delivery

Clinical Supervision Performance management

- Clinical supervision needs to be offered to everyone
- Learning circles created external to a specific workplace
- Opportunity to share challenges and to develop initiatives to address the issues around secondary trauma
- Use of formal and informal supports
- Invest in or develop a wellbeing program that supports staff from entry level, new staff in higher roles and succession planning for permanent continuous staff
- Create a system to recognise and respond to burnout

Partnerships

- Partner with other organisation to share innovative practices and research in particular industries that work alongside the Aboriginal child and family services, universities and health sector
- Partner with local communities, including schools, police and Aboriginal Medical Services etc.
- Develop partnerships with communities attraction and recruitment plans
- Child and family services to use AbSec's Theory of Change model to assist in its focus for Aboriginal Children, family and communities
- Aboriginal child and family services sector partner with each other to meet Office of Children's Guardian standards and identifying best practice
- Utilise any existing 'satellite' offices to do remote access
- Establish a specialist Aboriginal child and family sector recruitment agency

Upskilling

Participants discussed upskilling at length to develop and support the achievement and growth of Aboriginal people in the workforce. Successful professional development requires building a highly skilled, effective and sustainable Aboriginal child and family system, with investment into the growth of staff at various levels. Training, succession planning and professional development were identified by participants as the main components of workforce upskilling.



Training

Participants raised a number of issues regarding training which identified the government and other industries as being a part of a system failure.

At a system level, participants noted gaps between tertiary education and getting a job within local communities. They regarded this a result of training institutions failing to keep up to date with the workforce qualifications or skills that are required in local communities. Participants suggested that for future learning and development, these institutions need to change the education or qualifications they offer to match current and future needs of the sector and communities. Further, participants noted the need for greater access to mental health training, trauma informed practice, and for board members to learn about governance. This might include alternate delivery methods, including online modules.

Some participants suggested unethical practices by training companies, emphasising the need for greater transparency, accountability and strategic coordination of training, aligned to the needs of the Aboriginal child and family sector.

To better support access to training, participants suggested increasing paid study leave for workers and increasing resourcing available for skill development and training by explicitly including this in service delivery contracting and commissioning for Aboriginal child and family services.

Localised induction training for non-Aboriginal workers and managers on Aboriginal issues was identified as a particular issue within the sector, promoting greater understanding of local issues and the needs of Aboriginal colleagues and clients.

A barrier to accessing important training was the lack of available workers to backfill positions in smaller organisations.

Succession planning

Succession planning was noted as very important to an organisation's sustainability. A lack of career progression can lead to Aboriginal workers transferring to another organisation to work at a higher level. This requires the creation of positions with higher duties, to provide an avenue to retain experienced staff, build capacity, and increase job satisfaction.

Multiple organisations raised the concern of the risk associated to upskilling employees, who then moved on to another organisation. In some locations, this acted as a disincentive to upskill good workers for fear they will be poached by larger organisations. To avoid this issue, a participant suggested the implementation of guidelines for training, including the condition that if they leave within a specified timeframe, they must repay training costs.

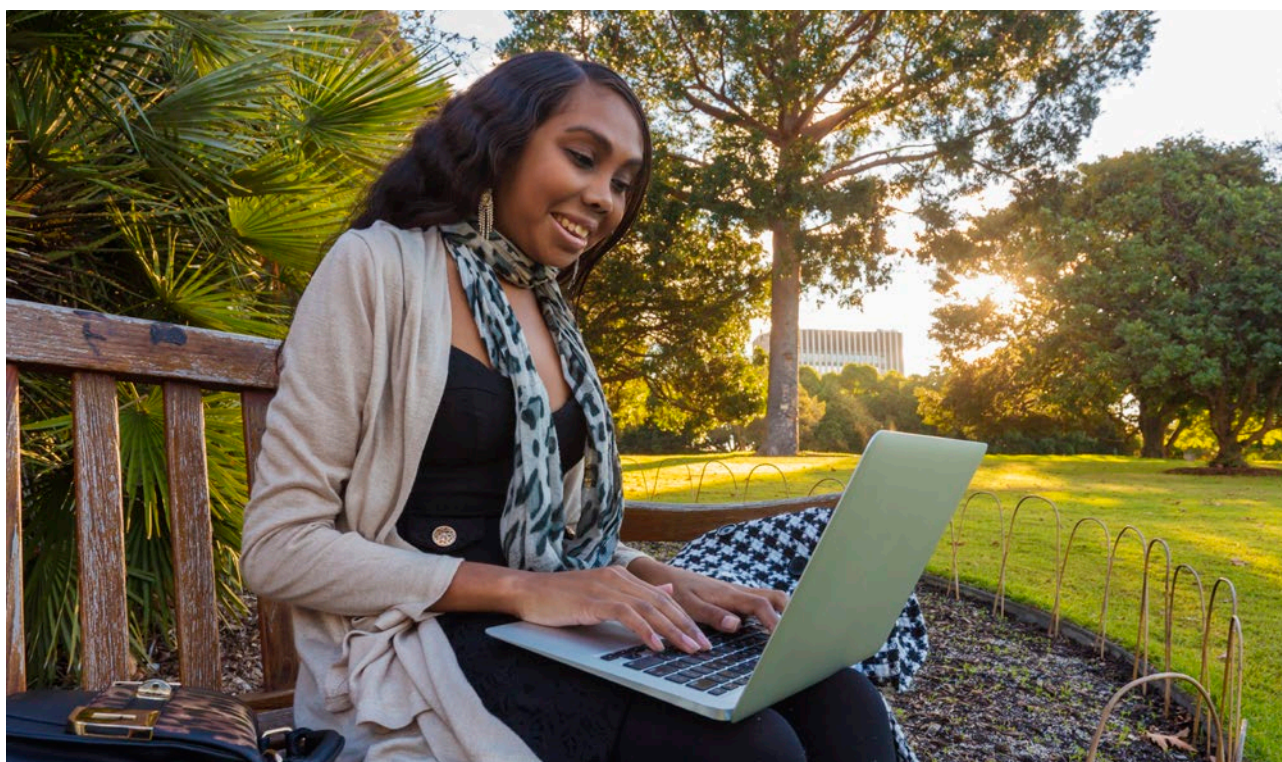
One location suggested that NGOs pool their recruitment process to establish backfilling positions for individuals to gradually pick up on-the-job skills, until they become an employee.

Professional development

Participants stated that existing professional development plans did not encourage staff to stay or join Aboriginal child and family services. Currently, participants found limited professional development, as most workers had specialised in their current positions. To allow for career progression to managerial roles, participants emphasised the need to upskill the Aboriginal workforce.

It was noted that to get into senior roles at DCJ there is an assessment process that may not be well suited to Aboriginal employees. For this to work for Aboriginal workers, it was recommended that DCJ should develop a culturally appropriate assessment.

Use of sideways transfers was noted as a way to increase opportunities for professional development, as well as internal recruitment for higher duties assignments. In addition, professional supervision or shadowing may provide workers with the opportunity for staff appraisals, skill development and recognition of leadership potential, which could be considered for future vacant positions.



Opportunities

Participants suggested the following areas that could assist with upskilling:

Professional development

- Partner with educational institutions to deliver training
- Use social model for sharing resources
- Look at retirees for skills transfer
- Recognise previous skills through Recognise Prior Learning's initiatives
- Use other means such as, mentoring, shadowing and coaching
- Provide study assistance
- DCJ to develop culturally appropriate assessment process so Aboriginal people can access senior roles

Training at an organisation level

- DCJ funding contracts to child and family services should have a percentage of funding (additional), build in, for mandate training
- Include proposed training budgets in employment contracts, including mandated training
- Partner with other organisation to share training in particular industries that work alongside the Aboriginal child and family services sector
- Develop in-house tools and manuals to upskill and train staff
- Training delivered in central locations within Districts, instead of only in the city
- Half-day close downs to do training and/or information sharing with staff
- DCJ to open up training to NGOs in the district
- Recruit internally for HDAs

Next Steps

The next stage will focus on the development of the state-wide strategy, drawing from the key themes, issues and opportunities identified through this consultation, contributing to the establishment of an Aboriginal Child and Family Service System Workforce Development Framework. This will include the development of resources for districts and Aboriginal organisations to support localised actions, which will be developed and tested with participants and other relevant stakeholders. AbSec thanks all those that contributed during these consultations in 2019.

Appendix: Glossary of Terms

ACRONYM	EXPANSION	EXPLANATION
AbSec	NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation	AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation is the peak Aboriginal child and family organisation in NSW
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	Aboriginal not for profit, non-governmental community controlled organisation
ACFIDS	The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Industry Development Strategy (The Strategy)	The Strategy was developed in 2017 in consultation with Aboriginal non-governmental organisations, peaks and communities to identify the investment and actions needed to develop the capacity of Aboriginal services across NSW.
ACFIS	The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy (The Investment Strategy)	The NSW Aboriginal Child and Family Investment Strategy is the operationalisation of the 2017 Strategy.
ACFS	Aboriginal Child and Family Service	These are providers of Aboriginal Child and Family Services within the Child and Family services sector.
ACFC	Aboriginal Child and Family Centres	They provide a mix of culturally safe services and support for Aboriginal families with children aged 0–8 years
AHO	The Aboriginal Housing Office	The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) is a statutory body established under the Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 (NSW) to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to affordable, quality housing.
ATO	Australian Taxation Office	The Australian Taxation Office (ATO) is the principal revenue collection agency of the Australian Government
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice	This is Department has replaced Department of Family and Community Service
ERA	Employment Related Accommodation	ERA is available for people whose employer offers long-term opportunities or are enrolled in an approved education training course
FACS	The previous Department of Family and Community Services	The previous Department of Family and Community Service, now known as Department of Communities and Justice
FFT	Functional Family Therapy	Functional Family Therapy (FFT) is a family-based prevention and intervention program that has been applied successfully in a variety of contexts to treat a range of these high-risk youth and their families.
HDA	Higher Duty Allowance	When an interim vacancy arises as a result of the substantive occupant vacating the job for a fixed term period, an HDA may be utilised to fill the vacancy.
IFBS	Intensive Family Based Services	The IFBS offers an intensive level of casework and a broad spectrum of support services to families in crisis, for a period of up to 12 months. The service is targeted at children who are at imminent risk of removal from their families, but where an assessment is made that there is a reasonable prospect of improvement within the family with the right support.

ACRONYM	EXPANSION	EXPLANATION
LGA	Local Government Area	The local government areas (LGA) of New South Wales in Australia describes the institutions and processes by which areas, cities, towns, municipalities, regions, shires, and districts can manage their own affairs to the extent permitted by the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) e.g. Sydney LGA The City of Sydney is the local government area covering the Sydney central business district and surrounding inner city suburbs of the greater metropolitan area of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Established by Act of Parliament in 1842.
MST	Multisystemic Therapy	Multisystemic therapy (MST) is an intense, family-focused and community-based treatment program for juveniles with serious criminal offenses and are possibly abusing substances. It is also a therapy strategy to teach their families how to foster their success in recovery.
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee	NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. This committee was once responsible for organising national activities during NAIDOC Week and its acronym has since become the name of the week itself.
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme	The National Disability Insurance Scheme provides support to people with disabilities. Core supports: daily living. Capital: large, 'once-off'. Capacity-building: a better life
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation	A not for profit organisation that operates independently of any government
NSW	New South Wales	One of the States of Australia
NSWALC	NSW Aboriginal Land Council	As the State's peak representative body in Aboriginal Affairs, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council aims to protect the interests and further the aspirations of its members and the broader Aboriginal community
OCG	Office of the Children's Guardian	The Office of the Children's Guardian is an independent statutory authority in NSW Government. We promote and regulate the quality of child safe organisations
OOHC	Out of Home Care	Out-of-home care is the care of children aged 0–17 years who are unable to live with their primary caregivers. It involves the placement of a child with alternate caregivers on a short- or long-term basis
PAT	Parents as Teachers	Parents as Teachers builds strong communities, thriving families and children that are healthy, safe and ready to learn.
PESTLE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal	A PESTEL analysis / model is a framework or tool used by marketers to analyse and monitor the macro-environmental (external marketing environment) factors that have an impact on an organisation. The result of which is used to identify threats and weaknesses which are used in a Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats analysis
PSP	Permanency Support Program	The Permanency Support Program provides tailored services to vulnerable children so that they can grow up in stable, secure and loving homes. Changes under the program began on 1 October 2017. Practices to further support permanency for children and young people and have been strengthened through amendments to the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 and Adoption Act 2000 passed in November 2018. The Permanency Support Program supports safety, wellbeing and positive life outcomes for children and young people in the child protection and OOHC systems in NSW.

ACRONYM	EXPANSION	EXPLANATION
RTO	Registered Training Organisation	A registered training organisation (RTO) is a training provider registered by Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA or a state regulator) to deliver VET services. RTOs provide quality training and qualifications that are nationally recognised.
SCHADS	Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services	This refers to the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010
Taleo	Talent Management Software Suite	Taleo is a cloud-based talent management software vendor that was acquired by Oracle in February 2012. The suite encompasses modules for recruiting, on-boarding, performance management, learning and development, succession planning and compensation management.
TEI	Targeted Earlier Intervention	Targeted Earlier Intervention (TEI) program delivers flexible support to children, young people, families and communities experiencing or at risk of vulnerability. It combines five separately funded DCJ programs into one outcomes-focused program. This includes: Aboriginal Child Youth and Family Strategy; Child Youth and Family Support; Community Builders; Families NSW and Getting It Together Services will be delivered under two broad streams: Community strengthening; and Wellbeing and safety. The TEI program focuses on the evidence to adapt service delivery to reflect what works.
VET	Vocational Education and Training	Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications have been developed with the specific goal of preparing students with skills for work. VET is designed to help people to join or re-join the workforce, move into a new career or gain additional skills in their existing career.
WWCC	Working With Children's Check	The Working With Children Check (WWCC) is a requirement for anyone who works or volunteers in child-related work in NSW. It involves a National Police Check (criminal history record check) and a review of reportable workplace misconduct.



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