

*“Cultural activities  
remind you of home.  
It’s cool to do  
those things.”<sup>81</sup>*

**Special needs of  
Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait  
Islander children**

<sup>81</sup> Young person’s view as quoted at page 12 of D Higgins, L Bromfield and N Richardson, *Enhancing Out-of-home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2005.

# Special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

## Key messages

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain over represented in out-of-home care, with increases noted in 2007–08. In the same period, the Department of Child Safety has sought to implement and strengthen services to remote communities in an effort to increase the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child safety system.
- The Child Guardian Survey found that 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in foster care and 56% in residential care felt in touch with their community.
- The Child Guardian Indigenous Child Placement Principle Audit 2008 found that scope exists for the Department of Child Safety to strengthen its systems, policies and processes underpinning its administration of the Indigenous Child Placement Principle and that doing so should improve cultural outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care.

## Expected outcome for children and young people

The child safety system respects that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is entitled to have their own set of values, ideals and principles which have been shaped since birth by their culture and that the child safety system provides these children an opportunity to preserve and enhance their connection with family, community, culture and spiritual home.

## Significance

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be over-represented in the child safety system, especially in out-of-home care, and a dedicated effort is required to achieve the best possible cultural outcomes.

## How the child safety system is working together

The Department of Child Safety is exploring an option to enter into a Statement of Commitment with the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Partnership to foster continuous improvement of the placement process and public reporting about compliance with the Child Placement Principle, prescribed under section 83 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*. This collaborative effort will assist the Department of Child Safety to achieve its mandated service delivery requirements in relation to placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care, including through involvement of recognised entities in the decision making process.

### Key findings in 2007–08

#### Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care

- 1880 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people were in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2007, which equates to almost one third of all children in out-of-home care.<sup>82</sup>
- There was an additional 394 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care as at 30 June 2008, totalling 2274.<sup>83</sup>
- Almost one third of all Community Visitor Serious Issues<sup>84</sup> reported for 2007–08 involved Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- As at 30 June 2007 the comparative rate of children and young people on child protection orders was 26.6 per 1000 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) and 4.8 per 1000 (non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander).<sup>85</sup>
- As at 30 June 2008, an additional 5.6 per 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were the subject of child protection orders, equating to a rate of 32.2 per 1000. The non-Indigenous rate has increased by 0.2 to 5.0 per 1000.<sup>86</sup>

#### Contact with family

All reports completed by Community Visitors for April and May 2007 (total 1084) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care were analysed and the following themes were identified in relation to ‘maintenance of family and other relationships’:<sup>87</sup>

- 20% of reports recorded that the child had regular contact with their mother
- 6% of reports recorded that the child had regular contact with their father
- 6.5% of reports recorded that the child had regular contact with at least one of their siblings

82 Page 20 and 80 of the Child Protection Queensland 2006–07 Performance Report, Department of Child Safety, Queensland, 2008.

83 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

84 Further explanation of Serious Issue Forms and how this data was derived is provided in Appendix C of this report.

85 Page 18 of the Child Protection Queensland 2006–07 Performance Report, Department of Child Safety, Queensland, 2008.

86 Unpublished data, Department of Child Safety, 2008.

87 Analysis of comments contained in Community Visitor reports regarding Standard of Care 16 ‘maintenance of family and other relationships’ using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences text analysis software.

- 13% of reports recorded that the child had regular contact with their extended family, and
- 12% of reports recorded that the child had phone contact with a member of their family or a person of significance.

## Connection to culture

The Child Guardian Survey<sup>88</sup> found that 63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in foster care felt in touch with their community. Residential care had a lower proportion, with 56% indicating they still felt in touch with their community.

### Child Guardian activities about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

#### An audit of compliance with section 83 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*

The Child Guardian conducted a review of the Department of Child Safety's systems, policies and practices for compliance with section 83 of the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

The Child Guardian made 28 recommendations to the Department of Child Safety to improve information systems, practices and record keeping to improve placement decisions involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. (The *Indigenous Child Placement Principle Audit Report 2008* is now available on the Commission's website.)

#### Visits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Queensland

Throughout 2007–08, the Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner visited many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland to build relationships and develop a better understanding about what is and is not working for children and young people in these communities, to inform the work of the Child Guardian.

#### Child Guardian Stamp of Approval



The Department of Communities is currently rolling out the *Safe Havens* initiative, which aims to provide support to children and families in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities affected by violence and abuse.

### Strategic action areas for 2008–09

The Child Guardian will strengthen its monitoring of cultural outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care.

The Child Guardian will continue to work with the Department of Communities to implement an agreed framework for monitoring and reporting on compliance with section 83 of the *Child Protection Act 1999* (the Indigenous Child Placement Principle).

88 A total of 510 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (from foster and residential care) responded to the Child Guardian's survey, administered in early 2008. The survey findings do not necessarily represent the views of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care.