



## **SUMMARY SHEET**

### **‘People don’t trust those pieces of paper that are provided’: A qualitative study of cultural planning and outsourced out-of-home care services in Western Australia**

Sharynne Hamilton, Larissa Jones, Millie Penny, Charmaine Pell, Sarah Maslen, Carol Michie, Raewyn Mutch, Melissa O’Donnell, Carrington Shepherd, Brad Farrant

#### **Background**

The provision of out-of-home care (OOHC) is outsourced to non-government agencies. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, cultural planning is the main mechanism for supporting the continued connections with their kin, family, Country, communities and their ancestral lands. Ideally, a cultural plan should include all information about these connections.

In Western Australia, cultural plans for Aboriginal children in OOHC are provided by the WA Department of Child Protection. We talked with OOHC agency staff and non-Indigenous foster carers with Aboriginal children in their care to find out their perspectives of cultural planning and whether they felt they were provided cultural knowledge about children, and whether cultural plans adequately provided information about children’s kin and family connections and culturally relevant activities for children.

We explored the interview data to examine leadership and guidance from the Department in relation to the provision of cultural plans, whether information was provided with efficiency, and in a responsive way, and how that then provided around accountability to Aboriginal children and families.

#### **Key Findings**

- Many cultural plans did not contain accurate, detailed and meaningful information about children and their families. In many cases there was no cultural plan available, or no knowledge of whether there was a plan or not.
- When agency workers or carers attempted to seek information from government, the told us they were not responded to, they did not feel trusted, and that, overall, it was hard work.
- They told us they often had to chase information or repeatedly ask for information about children and their families.
- They told us that there were high levels of staff turnover and not enough Aboriginal staff in the Department.
- Agency workers wanted cultural planning to be a meaningful exercise, so they could support the wellbeing and connections of Aboriginal children.
- Many carers explored ways to keep children in their care connected to culture and activity.
- Ultimately, participants described poor leadership by government actors and a failure to facilitate processes to provide OOHC agency staff with cultural plans that provided accountability to children in care:
- A lack of information about children and their families, meant that cultural connections for children was lost.

#### **Recommendations**

Forums that support relationships and partnerships between government and NGOs offer significant opportunities for sharing knowledge and information and initiating change. To ensure that cultural plans contain accurate, comprehensive and meaningful cultural information about children and their families and to support children’s connections with culture, kin and community, there is an urgent need to create community-led forums, inclusive of Elders, ACCOs and Aboriginal representative organisations for collecting cultural information about children and their families and informing the culturally secure care of Aboriginal children in foster care. The findings from this research suggest that there is a need to outsource both the care and the cultural planning of children to NGOs, who are best placed to know and serve their communities.