

Thank you Auntie Agnes Shea for your thoughtful Welcome to Country. I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the Nggunawal people, and pay respect to their Elders past and present and to future generations. I also want to pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People here with us today and those that have given so much to Aboriginal people throughout the years.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today at the David Hunter Memorial Lecture.

I would like to pay tribute to David Hunter, the work he did as a founding member of ANTaR, and the role that ANTaR continues to do in its pursuit; ***"To engage, educate and mobilise a broad community movement to advocate for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples."***

This is significant and important work, it is significant and important to pursue justice and truth telling. The state and territory ANTaR affiliates have played an important role in advocacy and education at the local level.

There appears to me to have been a shift in Aboriginal affairs in the last few years, the pursuit for justice no longer hinges on reconciling but rather on achieving self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as understood within a human rights framework. We are no longer marking our success on the determinates of non-Indigenous Australians, but rather focussing on realising equity of opportunity and achieving our aspirations as a peoples. Treaty has again entered the political landscape alongside calls for a Voice to Parliament, rather than symbolic constitutional recognition.

The numbers of Aboriginal children in out of home care today far outweigh the numbers of children removed during the Stolen Generations. The Family Matter Report released last year detailed that these numbers would triple in the next 20 years without immediate action.

Today I will outline the ways in which we at VACCA, with the support of the Victorian government, are implementing program and policy change with the intent of not simply seeing those numbers decrease, but ensuring that our children and young people in out of home care experience holistic, evidence based practice, programs and support that is wrapped in culture, where their voices are heard and respected.



## VACCA: An overview

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) established in 1977 as an Aboriginal community controlled and operated service.

**VACCA's objectives include:**

- The preservation, strengthening and protection of the cultural and spiritual identity of Aboriginal children
- Provision of culturally appropriate and quality services which are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities



VACCA  
Connected by culture

celebrating  
40 YEARS  
of service

**The Late Auntie Mollie Dyer - VACCA Founder**

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency was established in 1977 as a state-wide Aboriginal community controlled and operated service in response to the numbers of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and being adopted or fostered into non-Aboriginal care and or institutions. Many adoptive and care placements were breaking down and these children were ending up on the streets and in prisons. Our late Patron and founder, Auntie Mollie Dyer took many of these children into her care as did other Aboriginal families. Auntie Mollie, who had originally been working at the Aboriginal Legal Service was working with many clients who had been removed and were ending up in the criminal justice system.

The original Aboriginal Child Placement Agency sought to reduce the loss of children from the Aboriginal community and to provide them with their cultural identity. Our present day objectives include the preservation, strengthening and protection of the cultural and spiritual identity of Aboriginal children and to provide culturally appropriate and quality services which are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal communities. We grew out of the desire to bring our children and young people back home to community. That desire, and the desire that all Aboriginal children are safe – physically, emotionally and culturally is still what drives us today.

As Victoria's largest provider of Aboriginal family and child welfare for Victorian Aboriginal families and children, VACCA knows that push factors of children entering out-of-home care include poverty, poor mental health, family violence, drug and alcohol abuse and disability, combined with structural constraints such as institutional racism. This has created a legacy of inter-generational trauma that requires a more nuanced approach to rehabilitation, one that centralises culture and healing.

## Our Programs and Services



<p><b>Early Years Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Playgroups x 8 metro wide</li> <li>• Aboriginal Cradle to Kinder</li> <li>• Parents as First Educators</li> </ul> <p><b>Child Protection Support Service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lakidjeka ACSASS</li> </ul> <p><b>Out of Home Care, Placement &amp; Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinship Care</li> <li>• Extended Care (Home Based Care)</li> <li>• Permanent Care</li> <li>• Aboriginal Adolescent Community Placement House</li> <li>• Therapeutic Residential Care x 3 units</li> <li>• Lead Tennant</li> <li>• Leaving Care</li> <li>• Residential Education Support</li> <li>• Family Finding</li> <li>• Koorie Placement and Cultural Support</li> <li>• Foster Care Assessment and Recruitment</li> <li>• Targeted Care Packages</li> </ul> <p><b>Adult Healing Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link-Up Victoria</li> <li>• Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Support Service</li> <li>• Koorie Connect</li> </ul> <p><b>Healing Team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal Children's Healing Team</li> <li>• Therapeutic oversight programs and services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Adult support services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness Support Services</li> <li>• Justice Support Services</li> <li>• Drug and Alcohol Support Services</li> <li>• Emergency Relief</li> <li>• Koorie Women's Diversion</li> </ul> <p><b>Child &amp; Youth Support &amp; Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Support Planning</li> <li>• Cultural Support and Development</li> <li>• Koorie Kids Stay at School</li> <li>• Deadly Story Portal</li> </ul> <p><b>Cultural Strengthening Programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Koorie FaCES</li> <li>• Koorie Youth Traineeships</li> <li>• Possum skin cloak</li> <li>• Cultural camps</li> <li>• Art mentoring</li> <li>• Koorie Youth Leadership</li> <li>• NAIDOC Children's Day</li> <li>• Children's Christmas</li> </ul> <p><b>External Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nikara's journey</li> <li>• CSP state wide roll out</li> <li>• Cultural competency</li> <li>• Sector and DHHS training</li> <li>• Child Safe Standards</li> </ul> <p><b>Internal Training Unit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training all elements of casework in C&amp;F welfare</li> </ul>	<p><b>Family Support Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated Family Services</li> <li>• Family Mental Health Support</li> <li>• Aboriginal Stronger Families</li> <li>• Family Restorations/Preservation</li> <li>• Aboriginal Family Led Decision-Making</li> <li>• Aboriginal Child FIRST</li> </ul> <p><b>Family Violence Programs/Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal Family Violence workers 5 sites</li> <li>• Orana Gunyah F/V Women &amp; Children's Facility</li> <li>• Family Violence - Case Management, Outreach, Group Work, Perpetrator</li> </ul> <p><b>Research, Policy &amp; Advocacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and Development</li> <li>• Social Policy and Advocacy</li> <li>• Aboriginal Guardianship</li> <li>• Legal Unit</li> </ul> <p><b>Back of House</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous Quality Improvement</li> <li>• Corporate Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Payroll</li> <li>• Human Resources</li> <li>• Fleet management</li> <li>• Information, Technology &amp; Communications</li> <li>• Property Management</li> <li>• Workforce and Organisation development</li> <li>• Information management</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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Forty + years on and how proud would Auntie Mollie be that we have now so many people working to help achieve her dream. We haven't got there yet but if you see the extent of the programs we are delivering you can see that we are best placed to bring about better outcomes for our families.

This is a list of our programs. You will see that most of our services are at the "care" end of the out of home care spectrum although we do have services such as Lakidjeka which is an advisory service that the Department of Health and Human Services is to contact when they have a report about an Aboriginal child.

This is one of our statewide services as well as permanent care and the Link Up program. We also provide family support services for families who have children who are at risk of having their children entering child protection.

Our focus on family violence is critical as we know that 88% of our children come into care for family violence. Our supported playgroups, Koorie Connect and new programs to work with Maternal Child Health and with Parents as First Educators means we are able to work where our families need us.

**VACCA Celebrates 40 years +**



**Growth since 1996**

1996	2003	2010	2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 Programs</li> <li>• 34 staff</li> <li>• 4 vehicles, one typewriter</li> <li>• CEO managed all staff</li> <li>• Crisis mgt approach</li> <li>• Serious financial mgt issues</li> <li>• Serious operational issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 Programs</li> <li>• 95 staff</li> <li>• 50 vehicles, 94 computers</li> <li>• 5 Program Managers</li> <li>• Period of significant growth, had trust of funders – preparedness to invest in VACCA.</li> <li>• A time of consolidation, reviewing staff structure and improving systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 Programs</li> <li>• 160+ staff</li> <li>• 70 plus vehicles</li> <li>• Excess 180 computers</li> <li>• Executive Mgt Group</li> <li>• Leadership Group</li> <li>• Corporate &amp; Finance Unit</li> <li>• Research and Policy Unit</li> <li>• New Programs, Projects and Initiatives unit</li> <li>• Quality – Agency Registration</li> <li>• Family violence beginnings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 45 Programs</li> <li>• 320+ staff</li> <li>• 101 vehicles</li> <li>• Stronger Mgt, Corporate &amp; Client Services Infrastructure</li> <li>• Focus on quality practice</li> <li>• Investment in business systems</li> <li>• Growth – Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western metro &amp; Gippsland regions</li> <li>• Guardianship</li> <li>• Therapeutic service delivery</li> <li>• Kinship growth</li> <li>• Transitioning of children</li> <li>• Workforce strategy</li> <li>• Information Management Strategy</li> <li>• Technology Strategy</li> <li>• Communications and Fundraising strategy</li> <li>• Outcomes Framework</li> <li>• Healing Unit</li> <li>• Significant Family Violence focus</li> <li>• Cultural investment CSP, Return to Country, Family Finding, Genealogy</li> </ul>
Budget \$2m	Budget \$5m	Budget \$11.6m	Budget \$63m

VACCA today bears no comparison to the VACCA of the seventies, eighties or even the nineties but we are eternally grateful to our Elders and strong leaders of those era’s who lobbied and advocated strongly for change over the decades. Without them we wouldn’t be here today. And our purpose remains largely unchanged from the time VACCA was established in 1977, that is, to strengthen the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of Aboriginal children, individuals and families in their community.

From small beginnings, when we operated a handful of foster-care and family support services, had one typewriter ,the CEO managed 34 staff and the organisation operated in ‘survival’ mode, the organisation has developed into a multi-site statewide service with a diversity of programs.

Advocacy has always played a central role in the organisation’s operations and it remains so today with the added strength of a Research and Social Policy unit formed in 2010

Our staff complement is 400+ and forecast to grow to 550 by 2020. Aboriginal staff numbers are approximately 48% of VACCA’s workforce and our Workforce strategy looks at increasing this number exponentially.

## Aboriginal Children in Care

- There were **1,852** Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC as at the end of March 2018. This is a decrease of 6 children from the previous quarter at December 2017 (1,858)\*.
- Applying the 2016 ABS Census Aboriginal population data, the biggest growth of Aboriginal people is in Bayside Peninsula and Southern Melbourne
- Inner Gippsland has the highest proportion of Aboriginal children and young people in care at 13.9%.
- Mallee and Outer Gippsland have approximately 50% of their children with an Aboriginal carer and Outer Gippsland has about 65% of children with all their siblings. Other areas such as Outer Eastern Melbourne, Inner Eastern Melbourne, Bayside Peninsula and Wimmera South West have less than 20% of children with an Aboriginal carer

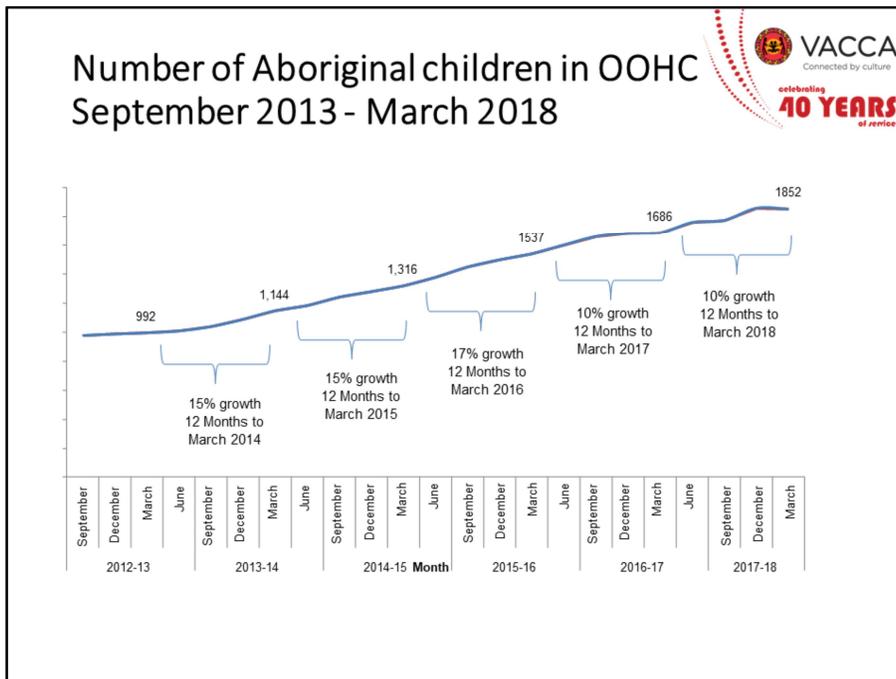
The data is still alarming:

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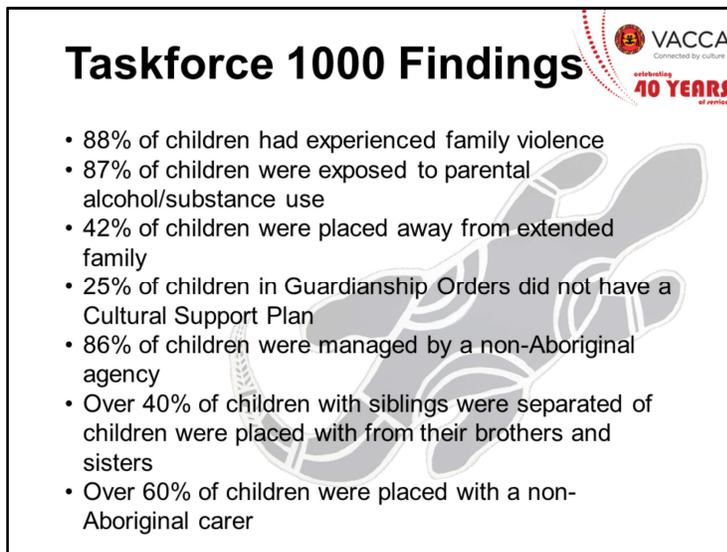
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This graphic highlights the unchecked growth in the numbers of Aboriginal children entering care over the past five years and while we can be pleased that the rate of growth is showing signs of slowing, it is nevertheless a growth in numbers.

We, along with many other Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in Victoria are now partners in the initiatives that are being driven with the state government and we all believe that if these reforms are sustained and supported for the future, that they will have an impact on these numbers.



## Taskforce 1000 Findings

- 88% of children had experienced family violence
- 87% of children were exposed to parental alcohol/substance use
- 42% of children were placed away from extended family
- 25% of children in Guardianship Orders did not have a Cultural Support Plan
- 86% of children were managed by a non-Aboriginal agency
- Over 40% of children with siblings were separated of children were placed with from their brothers and sisters
- Over 60% of children were placed with a non-Aboriginal carer

Taskforce 1000 was an inquiry established in 2014 by the Secretary DHHS and the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. The Inquiry examined the circumstances of (at that time) all Aboriginal children in care. By the time the Inquiry reported in 2016 the numbers of Aboriginal children in care in Victoria had gone up by a staggering 59%.

The Commissioner found that the known risk factors for Aboriginal children are family violence, parental alcohol and substance abuse, parental mental illness, physical and sexual abuse, neglect as well as the child’s risk taking behaviour and school attendance.

He said the following:

‘The genograms (of the children) painted a picture of the impact of invasion and colonisation, of intergenerational disengagement and disempowerment. They were critical in understanding how past government policies have impacted on Koori children, their families and community today. Through the genograms, we saw generations of connection with the criminal justice and child protection systems, unemployment, poverty, poor education, high rates of suicide and the over-riding impact of the past impacting on the present.’ (**Andrew Jackomos PSM** Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People)



Some important changes in Aboriginal Child Welfare include:

- In 2012 Victoria appointed Australia's first and only Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. Since this time a number of critical initiatives have been undertaken including:
- In 2013 a representative groups of ACCOs, CSOs provided a submission to government entitled *Koorie Kids: growing strong in their culture*.
- In 2013, VACCA commenced 'as if' section 18 pilot.
- In 2014 DHHS and CCYP agreed to undertake a joint initiative subsequently named Taskforce 1000 to review the circumstances of the approximately 1,000 children in out of home care.
- In 2015 the Victorian Aboriginal Children's Forum (ACF) was established as a representative Forum of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the community sector and Government. The ACF drives accountability and action around Aboriginal self-determination and address the over representation in out of home care with the Min. Jenny Mikakos co-chairing with CEO, ACCO
- In 2015, the "*Beyond Good Intentions Statement*" was developed. It cites the need for collaboration, reform and a fair restorative child and welfare system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Centre Child Welfare, mainstream CSO's particularly Berry Street's, Julian Pockock
- In 2016 - *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children*
- In 2016, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Corporation commenced Pilot for section 18.
- In 2017 - VACCA takes on full responsibility for children in care -section 18- (Nugel/Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care Program). An Australian first. We now have parental responsibility for 34 Aboriginal children on protection orders as part of ACAC, with another 34 expected by the end of this year. Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative is expected to be fully authorised by the end of this year.
- In 2018, tripartite partnership between Aboriginal community, Victorian Government and community services organisation was launched.

## Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement Latji Latji words for 'strong' and 'family'



- A groundbreaking tripartite partnership between the Aboriginal community, Victorian Government, and community service organization's was launched on 26 April 2018.
- The agreement operates as a dynamic and iterative plan for action to ensure all Aboriginal children and young people are safe, resilient, thriving and living in culturally rich, strong Aboriginal families and communities.
- The objectives of this Agreement will ensure that:
  - Aboriginal children and families are strong in culture and proud of their unique identity
  - ACCO's are resourced adequately to care for their children, and
  - Aboriginal knowledge and experience will drive investment and innovation to the sector



*Biganga (possum skin cloak), 2017 Lee Darroch, Yorta Yorta, Multi Multi, Boon Wurrung*

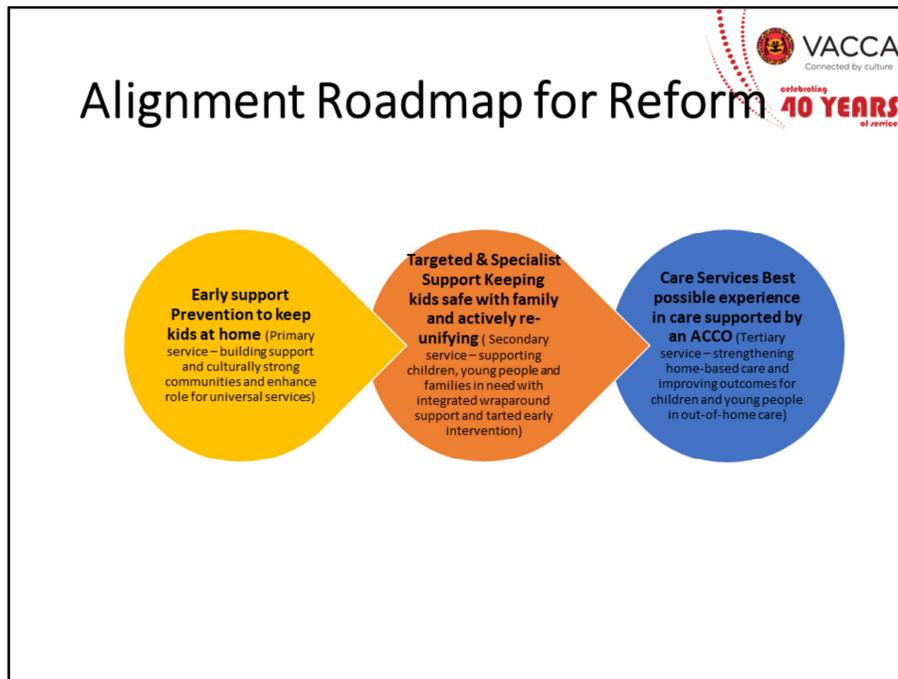
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Important not to lose the work of the Koorie Kids and to further the work of Wungurilwil Gagapduir the Aboriginal children’s forum endorsed the alignment of the actions to the government’s Roadmap for Reform. There was a strong and compelling position from ACF members that is it time to shift to a broader set of indicators that reflect a systemic view of keeping Aboriginal children and young people with families and aligns with the Roadmap for Reform. The existing indicators would be kept and captured under “Care Services” and new indicators would be developed around the front end - Early Support and Targeted and Specialist Support. These indicators would be rigorously reviewed by the Wungurilwil Gagapduir implementation group and highlights (areas of concern and progress) would be brought to the attention of the ACF.

**The recommendation was to establish a comprehensive set of KPIs focused on Early Support and Targeted and Specialist Support and present these for endorsement at the September 2018 ACF by the Wungurilwil Gagapduir implementation group**



Now have a strong Aboriginal child welfare network of services across Victoria



When we speak of our approach I am speaking about our broad approach to the field of child welfare. We firstly, and firmly believe that as the Indigenous Peoples of this land we have rights specifically relating to this Indigenous status as they are outlined in human rights instruments. In particular, I am referring to **Article 1 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of both Covenants states:**

**All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.**

I am also referring to UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Article 3 which says:

Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Secondly, and no less important, we believe in and follow our cultural protocols, beliefs and values. We believe that Aboriginal culture holds the key. This means that even though we use child welfare methods and systems, we adapt them and use them in ways which are culturally safe for our children and families.

We are constantly advocating for improvements and changes to child welfare practice because we know that the current system does not suit us and our children's needs. We know that the scale of trauma in our communities also requires additional approaches that address the experience of collective trauma and that the only way to do this is to have more cultural activities for our communities.



## VACCA's Approach:

- Understands the extent of trauma in Aboriginal communities and its impacts on individuals, and families,
- works with adults, children and families in the context of their past and present experiences of trauma,
- promotes healing through connection to culture and safe relationship building,
- listens to the voice of the individual,
- fosters a culture of non-blame,
- creates a culturally and emotionally safe environment in which individuals are respected and valued,
- employs culturally competent staff and creates practices that acknowledge and demonstrate cultural respect,
- provides support for individuals to regain a sense of control over their daily lives and actively involve them in the journey,
- shares decision making and planning processes with those using our services, and actively engages community in the design and evaluation of programs, and
- integrates and co-ordinates care to holistically meet the needs of community members.

Strengthening culture and connecting children to community is a key therapeutic strategy and critical to their healing.

As the Healing Foundation states “Healing is a restoration of wholeness. This a matter of the mind, body and spirit.”

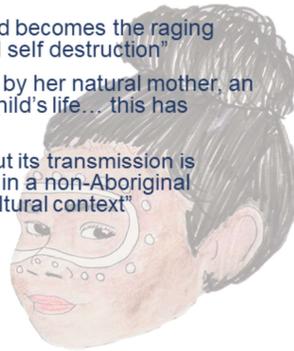
Healing for an Aboriginal child requires an understanding of who they are culturally, where they are from (where they belong) and who they belong to. Spiritual healing requires an understanding of their identity, connection to family, Aboriginal community and spiritual connection to country and land.

## A cultural perspective to the difficulties of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal families:



- Managing critical milestones such as identity formation during adolescence – “a child who is conflicted about his identity is severely handicapped”.
- Bonding – “often the well bonded four year old becomes the raging adolescent bent on both personal and familial self destruction”
- Continuity of care – “a child may be cared for by her natural mother, an aunty and a cousin at different points in the child’s life... this has traditionally been seen as desirable...”
- Cultural maintenance – “culture is complex but its transmission is simple... If an Aboriginal child is being raised in a non-Aboriginal environment they will acculturate within its cultural context”

“ (Kenn Richard, 2004)



The western-centric and individualistic ‘best interests of the child principles’ do not take into account an Aboriginal perspective. Identity formation; bonding; and continuity of care have a bias in favour of Anglo European worldviews and need to be examined through an Aboriginal lens, consistent with an Aboriginal worldview.

Kenn Richard does just this reflecting on his own extensive experience working within an Aboriginal service agency in Toronto, Canada.

*Cultural maintenance – “culture is complex but its transmission is simple... If an Aboriginal child is being raised in a non-Aboriginal environment they will acculturate within its cultural context”*

**VACCA's Aboriginal Children's healing team**

Delivering an integrated, culturally appropriate and trauma informed approach to working with Aboriginal children and families

- Trauma informed psycho-social assessments
- Trauma informed approaches
- Theoretical development
- Training, leadership across VACCA's services



Possum skin cloak made by VACCA children, workers and Elders

VACCA  
40 YEARS

VACCA has introduced into our organisation a Healing Team. The Healing Team is the central point for the development across VACCA of an integrated, culturally appropriate and trauma informed approach to working with our families, children and young people. We undertake trauma-informed psycho-social assessments of children. Promote trauma informed approaches to understanding the needs of Aboriginal children in VACCA's care. We undertake theoretical development work to integrate culturally appropriate Aboriginal Healing ways. Provide training to VACCA staff and provide leadership across our organisation to implement trauma informed therapeutic practice into our work.

**Holistic healing approach** –to provide for the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of children and families

**Culture as treatment** –the affirmation and enhancement of Indigenous culture as essential to treating the disconnection which lack of parental capacity is often a symptom of

**Family strengthening approach** –to address the underlying issues by promoting a positive and culturally appropriate approach to the family environment that builds on strengths rather than focusing on problems. One of the critical strengths we always identify is the strength of Aboriginal cultural family practices

**Culture as resilience** – which, along with a family strengthening approach, builds on the resilience of families and increasing resilience by creating a culturally imbued framework for families

**Empowerment model** – which engages participant families in the process of addressing issues so that they become active participants in treatment rather than passive recipients of a service.

# Government commitment is improving outcomes in Victoria



- Treaty discussion
- Self determination key policy of Government
- Various agreements
  - Marrung – Education
  - Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja – Justice
  - Korin Korin Balit Djak – Health & Human Services
  - Dhelk Dja – Family Violence
  - VAAF – Aboriginal Affairs
  - Wungurilwil Gaggapduir – Aboriginal Children’s Agreement
- Ministerial commitment
  - ACF – co chaired Aboriginal Sector and Minister
  - Aboriginal Guardianship enacted and funded
  - Transitioning Aboriginal children being actioned
  - Funding for Aboriginal to Aboriginal sector policy
  - Funding cultural components child protection
    - CSP State Coordinator position and portal
    - Return to Country
    - Model development Resi Care



Treaty discussion

Self determination key policy of Government

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# Making Headway at VACCA

- Development of a more comprehensive Aboriginal child welfare model
  - Outcomes Framework
  - Cultural Therapeutic Framework
  - Targeted Care Packages
  - CSP State Coordinator
  - Deadly Story portal
  - Return to Country
  - Family finding
  - Family violence services
  - Redress RCISA
  - Expansion child welfare Inner Gippsland and Ovens-Murray
  - Workforce advocacy
  - Link Up
  - Family Violence
  - Youth
  - Education
  - Early Years

## Objectives of the Transition



Enables Aboriginal children and young people subject to protection orders and placed in the out-of-home care service system to be case managed, wherever possible, by an ACCO.

ACCOs, CSOs and the department continue to work together to grow and maintain a progressive, robust, transparent and sustainable framework that enables Aboriginal communities to achieve priority 4 and 5 of the Aboriginal Children's Forum:

- place all Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care under the authority, care and case management of an ACCO; and
- with the commitment across and within departments and the community sector, build the capacity of Aboriginal families, communities, ACCOs and the sector to care for children and young people to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC.

I want today to speak on two major areas of work for the ACF and Wungurilwil Gagapduir firstly the traditioning of Aboriginal children to Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations. The objective is to enable Aboriginal children and young people subject to protection orders and placed in the out-of-home care service system to be case managed, wherever possible, by an ACCO.

Implementation of Priority 4 and 5 of the Aboriginal Children's Forum

- *'place all Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care under the authority, care and case management of an ACCO'*
- *'with the commitment across and within departments and the community sector, build the capacity of Aboriginal families, communities, ACCOs and the sector to care for children and young people to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care'*

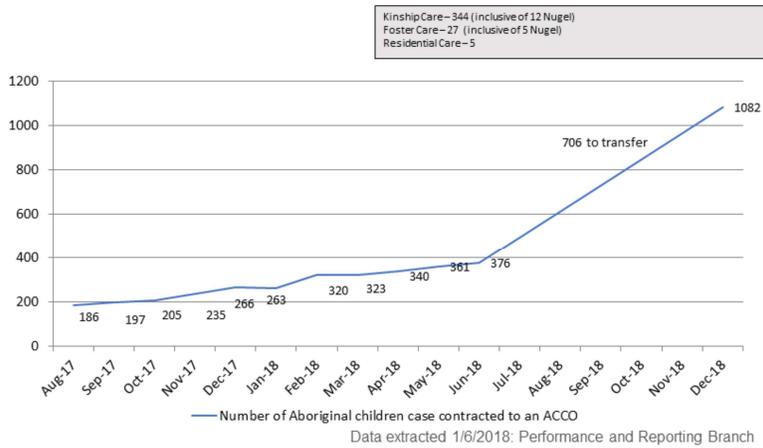
Practically, this means we are:

- gradually transferring Aboriginal children involved with Child Protection to the care and case management of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) (from community service organisations (CSOs) and the Department of Health and Human Services (the department).
- This requires the transfer of resources, targets, and funding from CSOs and the department to ACCOs, as well as ensuring the safe transition of children and their carers to ACCOs.

## Where are we now?



The total number of Aboriginal children in OoHC case contracted to ACCOs by end of June 2018 was 376 which represents 28 percent of Aboriginal children in OoHC.



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## Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (S18) and Transition (Contracted case management)



- Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* provides for the Secretary to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified functions and powers conferred on the Secretary in respect to an Aboriginal child subject to a protection order.
- Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) is the new program supporting section 18 implementation
- Under ACAC, once a protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person has been made by the Children's Court, approved Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) may be authorised to take on responsibility for the child's case management and statutory case plan.
- This differs from Transition work, which is the transfer of contracted case management responsibilities.

The other significant program S18 Aboriginal children in Aboriginal Care.

- Section 18 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* provides for the Secretary to authorise the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to perform specified functions and powers conferred on the Secretary in respect to an Aboriginal child subject to a protection order.
- Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) is the new program supporting section 18 implementation
- Under ACAC, once a protection order for an Aboriginal child or young person has been made by the Children's Court, approved Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) may be authorised to take on responsibility for the child's case management and statutory case plan.
- This differs from Transition work, which is the transfer of contracted case management responsibilities.

## Embedding self-determination



- Requires a relationship built on trust and integrity: it is a sustained relationship between groups of people working towards shared goals.
- Articulates Aboriginal people's voice into the plan, into the vision, strategies, indicators and outcomes with shared accountability and buy in from the sector
- Promoting and supporting Aboriginal organisations to deliver services to their communities
- Explore partnerships with Indigenous organisations within a framework of self-determination and Indigenous control.
- Address power inequalities, with genuine efforts to share power, including through negotiated agreements.

Embedding self-determination and achieving these objectives will require individual community sector organisations to be committed to the process beginning from the Board down to individual staff and how they interact with clients. To a large extent the sector has already responded to change when the DHHS Standards were introduced and we are now doing so again in the aftermath of the Royal Commission with the introduction of Child Safe Standards.

The same measures and strategies need to be brought to bear to realise self-determination for Aboriginal people.



**Strengthening organizational capability to support Aboriginal self determination**

- Behaviors
- Attitudes
- Skills
- Knowledge
- Competencies
- Services
- Practice



Self determination is more than giving Aboriginal organisations funding and walking away. For us at VACCA we too have a way to go. Implementing self-determination will require changes in our organisations from our governance structures and systems to our face to face service delivery.

As a sector we have all experienced the changes brought about by the DHHS Standards which also include cultural standards supported by the Cultural Competence Addendum. Self-determination is also about creating new structures, policies, processes and systems and resourcing streams to realise new standards.

## Self Determination theory



- To live autonomously – to live a life that is self-endorsed, a life that accords with one's genuine values and preferences
- Competence, which refers to our basic need to master certain skills or techniques that enable us to operate more effectively in the world and to achieve our desired ends in life.
- Relatedness, refers to our basic need for social connectedness, our need to feel a sense of belonging
- The basic message that emerges is that when people lack autonomy—when rather than feeling in control of their own lives, people instead feel that they are being controlled or dominated by others or by their social, economic, or political circumstances—their mental and physical health tends to deteriorate, and for those who feel the least autonomous, the outcomes are generally the worst.

Source: Deci and Ryan

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci in the field of social psychology are the originators of self-determination theory—an empirically derived theory of human development and well-being which identifies three basic psychological needs that “are universally required for humans to thrive” (Ryan and Sapp 2007: 75).

First and foremost is the need for autonomy. To live autonomously is to live a life that is self-endorsed, a life that accords with one’s genuine values and preferences. The opposite of autonomy is the feeling that one’s life is being restricted, controlled, or dictated by forces that one does not freely or willingly endorse.

The second is competence, which refers to our basic need to master certain skills or techniques that enable us to operate more effectively in the world and to achieve our desired ends in life.

The third, relatedness, refers to our basic need for social connectedness, our need to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of importance to a larger social order or social grouping (Ryan and Sapp 2007: 75–6; Deci and Ryan 2012a). While each of these basic needs is essential to healthy development and psychological well-being,

Ryan and Deci are unequivocal in their conclusion that none is more important than the need for autonomy (Ryan and Sapp 30 Restoring Indigenous Self-Determination 2007: 91).

Self-determination theory has been empirically tested in a wide variety of social settings and environments, and these studies confirm that when any of these basic needs, especially the need for autonomy, is frustrated, psychological ill-health in the form of depression, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and passivity, and social dysfunction is the result (Ryan and Deci 2008; 2011).

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**Self-determination is about empowerment**

For Aboriginal children it should be about developmentally appropriate exercise of an Aboriginal child's right to:

- Freedom
- Dignity and respect
- Choice and control
- Participation
- Accessibility
- Partnerships
- Systemic equality
- Decision making –the rights to make decisions about and exercise over their lives

VACCA  
celebrating 40 YEARS

Over the years we have argued for change in legislation and policy based on the principle of our right to self-determination. We argued for the formation of our own health, legal, education and children's services invoking the right of self-determination.

What happens then about the rights of the individual adult, child or young person in this framework of self-determination.

We would argue that having better legislation and policies helps and we have seen improvements over the years. However, given the demographic profile of our people, disadvantaged, young and incarcerated or subject to state intervention in their lives, many of our people are in a constant state of disempowerment.

So self-determination that applies to Aboriginal children who experience this disempowerment should be about developmentally appropriate exercise of an Aboriginal child's right :

Freedom – to plan their own lives with necessary supports

Dignity and respect – all people have a right to be treated with respect

Choice and control – Aboriginal have the right to change what they will do with their lives and to exercise their right to make their own choices.

Participation – full and effective participation and inclusion in society, community

Accessibility – access to services and supports freely available to all

Partnerships – must recognise and respect cultural difference, strengths and a shared commitment to building deeper, respectful and genuine relationship and work to address power imbalances.

Systemic equality – systems have policies, programs and practices and decision-making that take account of individual differences

Decision making – capacity to make evidence based decisions. The rights to make decisions about and exercise over their lives

Self-determination provides a basis for decision-making when it comes to Aboriginal children

All Aboriginal children should experience and learn about what it means to be a fully-functioning Aboriginal adult when they turn 18 able to realise and enjoy their rights as Indigenous people of this land, connected to their people and culture and able to enjoy their native title rights as well.



How will our practice with Aboriginal children promote self-determination in all aspects of our work?

Self-determination is about having appropriate Aboriginal governance structures that allow individuals to make real choices and decisions that affect their own life. For children it's about knowing who you are, what you want and how to go about getting it.

For Aboriginal children and young people to feel a sense of self-determination is not only about imparting the skills and beliefs onto the child or young person but by including self-determination into the social and societal context in which they live. Aboriginal children need to shape their chosen outcomes, make choices and express preferences across their daily lives and delineate goals specific to the improvement of Aboriginal children and young people's self-determination.

As Aboriginal services we need to define the construct of self-determination into effective practices. At VACCA we believe that Aboriginal children have the right to

They should be able to exercise these rights as they become aware of them.

At the age of adulthood they should be in a position to exercise all their rights as an Indigenous person as well as an Indigenous person who is part of a collective, a tribe, nation or mob. To be in a position of full-empowerment one doesn't turn on the switch at the age of 18. The child has to grow into this empowered adult with knowledge of who they are and what their rights are.

If we are to support the development of our children, especially those in care into fully functioning, participating Aboriginal adults then we need to make sure we do the things necessary for their development into that fully functioning, participating Aboriginal adult that is culturally aware and connected to their people. The work begins when they are born.

For Aboriginal children we have identified this list as above.

## What could future system look like for Aboriginal people of Victoria

- Community-driven processes of reinvigoration and reconnection
- Resurgence and sustainable self-determination in the daily actions of Victorian Aboriginal people's honoring and fulfilling their inherent responsibilities. Which encompass language revival, maintenance of extended kinship relations, ceremonial roles and responsibilities, story telling, history telling, restoration of land-based and water based cultural practices, etc., that renew commitments to nurturing and honoring relationships that promote the health and wellbeing of their communities.
- Service system that meets the cultural and welfare needs of Aboriginal Victorians

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## In closing..



VACCA's progress over the years has been driven by our motivation to do the best for our children, which for Aboriginal children, like any other children is to remain with their families or to return to them.

Families are where children learn without being taught, where intangible cultural heritage, or the way we do things is passed down. It is the space within which resilience and character is built. Where culture and heritage is passed down.

However, we also know that some families can be dangerous places for children and they need to be removed to places of safety. It should not follow however, that they then forfeit all that they had if they remained with their families. Temporary places of safety can become permanent and we need to be conscious of the passing of time and the impact this has on the lives of these innocents and therefore that our approach to working with our children should never be one where we "leave this or that to later". Our approach from the start should be that these children in their development years are our community members whose future has been entrusted to us and in an environment where it is easy to let standards slip because of some contingency or other we need to be more vigilant than ever. We have a duty of care as Aboriginal people that not only are our children safe but that they also grow into Aboriginal adults who take their places alongside us in the future as community members.

After forty years of serving our community we are more aware of this now than we have ever been. I urge you to do the same and wish you all the very best in your work with our children.