



Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Child Protection**

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILD PROTECTION

**DIRECTIONS FOR ABORIGINAL
CULTURAL LEARNING**

August 2009

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Directions for Aboriginal Cultural Learning sets out strategies to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence of all staff to achieve better engagement and better outcomes with Aboriginal families.

The Directions for Aboriginal Cultural Learning follow from the Aboriginal Services Framework and the Aboriginal Employment and Learning Strategy, and are a key part of achieving the Department's strategic priority to build its learning and performance culture. The strategies are consistent with the Department's approach to becoming a learning organisation as set out in the People Development Framework. This envisages the Department enabling continuous learning through a range of activities, above and beyond traditional training or formal learning, and particularly recognises the value of information exchange between staff.

The overall approach of the Directions for Aboriginal Cultural Learning is to integrate learning about Aboriginal history and culture, traditional "Aboriginal cultural awareness", with the case practice and service delivery advice and support provided by key Aboriginal staff. This involves Districts and other service delivery units creating and supporting learning opportunities that encompass both of these essential aspects of learning to inform practice. The approach also recognises and values Aboriginal practice advice and support as providing learning of itself.

The Aboriginal cultural learning opportunities will be developed within individual work areas with the Department's Aboriginal staff supported by the Aboriginal Engagement and Coordination Directorate (AECD) assisted by the Learning and Development Centre.

The Directions for Aboriginal Cultural Learning introduces Aboriginal Practice Networks as one substantial means to drive and support this to occur

Aboriginal Practice Leaders

Aboriginal Practice Leaders (APL) are central to building service delivery capacity for Aboriginal children and families. The APLs will lead the development and implementation of cultural learning strategies as a key part of the role

Overall, the APLs will champion the development of consistent and high standards of services to Aboriginal children and families by:

- Contributing to the development and implementation of effective practices for working with Aboriginal children and their families.
- Providing high-level advice to the District Director and leadership team on issues relating to Aboriginal services that is proactive, solution-focussed and responsive to local needs.

- Developing and implementing cultural learning strategies that include mentoring and coaching.
- Implementing quality assurance mechanisms that support the monitoring and continuous improvement of services to Aboriginal children and their families.

Aboriginal Practice Networks

Aboriginal Practice Networks (APN) will be developed in each District and will be focused on answering the following key questions:

- Are we meeting best practice standards to create safety for Aboriginal children and their families who come into contact with the child protection system?
- Are Aboriginal children and families better off for having had contact with the Department?

APN participants comprise district Aboriginal staff and non-Aboriginal staff with high levels of contact with, or interest in, Aboriginal people, for example:

- Aboriginal Practice Leader
- Senior Practice Development Officer
- Youth and Family Support Workers
- Community Child Protection Workers
- Strong Families Coordinators if needed
- Field Officer's (with high proportion of Aboriginal cases)
- Team Leaders and Assistant District Director as needed

The APN will implement results based processes to determine:

- How the District measures if Aboriginal children and families are better off?
- How the District measures if services are being delivered well to Aboriginal children and families?
- How the District is performing on the most important of these measures?
- Who the stakeholders are in helping the staff and the District to do better?
- What will work to achieve better engagement and outcomes, including no cost and low cost ideas?
- What are the components of an action plan for continuous improvement?
- How to use cultural learning effectively?

Local Cultural Learning Strategies

A range of activities can provide dedicated opportunities for cultural learning in the workplace. The essence of these is to create the time and space, combine the presentation of material that furthers cultural knowledge with discussion of case practice and service delivery issues, and to do so in an environment where it is okay to say 'I don't know'. The following anticipated activities are indicative of what can occur:

1. The use of case audits was a recommendation of the Review of Multiple Placements (2008) and the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (2009). The audit as a cultural learning tool can be used to examine how effective and appropriate current practices are with Aboriginal families. The process of examination and open discussion can analyse the strengths and weaknesses of case management and the impacts on the Aboriginal family and child.

Case audits can assist in identifying gaps and guide the development of other strategies to address cultural learning within the work area.

The audit process will be implemented within, and supported by, the Aboriginal Practice Network.

2. Discussions facilitated by Aboriginal staff may include Aboriginal history, cultural traditions and local customs. The topics will be driven by the discussions from the Aboriginal Practice Networks. These presentations should always include consideration of questions such as: "How has this affected the families with which we work?" and "What does this mean for how I work with Aboriginal families and children?" Such sessions do not seek to make everyone an expert on Aboriginal history and culture and this alone would not improve service delivery. Rather such sessions should increase staff sensitivity, confidence and persistence in engaging with Aboriginal families.
3. Other activities will be informed by the District's place in the local community and could include forums that welcome local Aboriginal stakeholders and Elders into the work area. Specific events with relative carers where the discussion can range beyond immediate case management concerns are also likely to be helpful in building relationships as well as promoting learning.

Learning and Development Centre Training

As the preceding strategies indicate, it is important that Aboriginal cultural learning is not presented as a stand alone activity.

The skills, knowledge and specific understandings required when working with Aboriginal people need to be clearly integrated into the development and delivery of all learning opportunities including formal training. This includes consideration of how information is presented to staff, the examples used and, when appropriate, the use of Aboriginal facilitators and presenters.

Similarly, it is important that Aboriginal staff participate in the range of training opportunities that are available and relevant to their roles. Ensuring that there are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff in training events will, with an interactive learning approach, encourage cross cultural learning for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.

The Aboriginal Engagement and Co-ordination Unit and the Learning and Development Centre are partnering to ensure this occurs.

Aboriginal Cultural Learning Resources

The Aboriginal Engagement and Co-ordination Unit have a range of resources on its Sharepoint worksite (under the Service Delivery link). These cover reconciling with the past, working with Aboriginal people in the Department, and Aboriginal historical experiences. The resources include:

- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 full Apology to Australia's Aboriginal People speech.
- Power Point presentations titled: 'Working Effectively with Indigenous People' and 'Working in Partnerships with Aboriginal People.'
- Casework Practice Manual/Resource Document – A Guide to Completing a Record of Child Information (ROCI) Form –Identity and Culture.
- The WA Aborigines Act 1905.
- Oral Histories from Aboriginal people across regional WA.
 - Yamatji: Aboriginal Memories of the Gascoyne.
 - Mt Margaret Missionaries and the Aftermath (Gold Fields).
 - A Springvale Childhood (Kimberley).
 - Before the Gardia (Kimberley).
 - Noonkanbah (Kimberley).
 - Old Law, Karitya Ways (Kimberley).
 - They Get Heaps: A Study of Attitudes in Roebourne (Pilbara).
 - Two Women of Jigalong (Pilbara) pdf.
- Broken Spears: Aboriginals and Europeans in the South West of Australia.
- Clash in the Wheatbelt (South West).

Districts should also have some resources that can be used to inform and promote discussion. The DVD *First Australians (including Chapter 5 "An Unhealthy Government Experiment" Western Australia 1897 – 1937)* provides a strong understanding of historical issues. The Learning and Development Centre can provide copies to Districts and other service delivery units.