



Developing Capacity Through Partnerships

A promising model for capacity building partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and non-Indigenous services



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Contents

Introduction and purpose	4
Key Partnership Drivers	6
Transition to NGO service provision in New South Wales	6
State-level partnership agreements	7
National partnership focus	7
What is the capacity building partnership model?	8
The capacity building partnership model	9
Pre-partnership	11
Phase 1 - Establishment	12
Phase 2 - Governance	14
Phase 3 - Service development	15
Phase 4 - Agency support	17
Managing Risks	18
Outcomes and broader application	20
Potential outcomes	20
Broader application	21
Endnotes	22

Introduction and purpose

A ground-breaking new approach to building capacity for Aboriginal child and family service delivery is emerging in New South Wales (NSW). A partnership model is supporting two-way learning between mainstream non-government organisations (NGOs) and Aboriginal communities. This model has a strong capacity building focus. It is opening up new space for the empowerment of Aboriginal communities to effect unique and quality service responses to the significant challenges facing their children and families.

The partnership model has been designed and spearheaded by the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (AbSec), the peak body for Aboriginal child welfare services in NSW. Working in partnership with mainstream peak body, the Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and the State Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), AbSec is supporting partnerships between mainstream non-government organisations and Aboriginal communities.

The goal of this initiative is to build strong and accredited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) delivering out-of-home care (OOHC) services state-wide. Ultimately the goal that has been agreed between government and the NGO sector is that all Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in NSW will be supported by Aboriginal agencies.¹ The initiative parallels the transition of all out-of-home care service delivery to the NGO sector in NSW and seeks to capture the opportunity to build capacity for Aboriginal communities to deliver the transitioned services.

The evidence is clear that stronger outcomes in community-wellbeing can be achieved where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered to respond to the challenges they face.² Culturally tailored services are also needed to ensure that they are appropriate for and used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.³ The development of strong ACCOs has significant potential to promote both these objectives while serving broader goals of

community development and economic empowerment, building social capital for some of NSW's most disadvantaged communities.

Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and mainstream agencies present opportunities to increase quality service delivery while promoting community-led and managed solutions to child and family needs.⁴ They can provide space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to benefit from governance and service capacity within large mainstream NGOs. Genuine partnerships can enable mainstream NGOs to benefit from the cultural knowledge, strength and community connections of ACCOs.⁵ They also create real opportunity for mainstream NGOs to fulfill important commitments to walking alongside and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are commonly made in their Reconciliation Action Plans.

Despite this potential, there has been limited attention to the processes, time, resources and support required to make genuine partnerships between ACCOs and non-Indigenous agencies a reality. The NSW capacity building approach is designed with strong consideration of what is required in this space, comprehensive state-wide coverage, and Aboriginal participation and leadership throughout model design and implementation.

Capacity building partnerships are not the silver-bullet to meet the needs of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Australia. A key aspect of the NSW transition is valuing the existing strengths of Aboriginal organisations, recognising that formal service partnerships are not always necessary for capacity growth. Direct capacity building support provided by AbSec to existing ACCOs has already contributed to an increase from approximately 350 to 600 placements in the first 12 months of the transition. However, well documented service capacity gaps for communities in many regions⁶ indicate that genuine partnerships could bring enormous benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery across Australia.

This brief provides insight into the NSW partnership-based capacity building model; its drivers, elements and early successes. It describes the model design and processes undertaken or planned in each phase of partnership development. The significant promise evident in early implementation indicates opportunity for cross-jurisdiction and cross-sector learning about what is required to support and enable genuine partnerships that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead positive change for their children and families.

An Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) or service is:

- an incorporated Aboriginal organisation
- initiated by a local Aboriginal community
- based in a local Aboriginal community
- governed by an Aboriginal body which is elected by the local Aboriginal community
- delivering a holistic and culturally appropriate service to the Community which controls it.

– NACCHO – viewed 5 May 2013 at <http://www.naccho.org.au/aboriginal-health/definitions/>

"This is a radically different partnership to the non-useful partnerships where the Aboriginal partner is only token, providing the community or cultural component but not the services."
– Barry Lenihan, AbSec



Representatives from UnitingCare CYPF, Board members from Ngurambang OOH Service and AbSec on the day of signing the partnership agreement.

Key Partnership Drivers

A number of key drivers supported the initiation of the capacity building partnership model. These included: the transition of OOHC service provision to the NGO sector, several key partnerships between NGO peak bodies and between AbSec and government, and the national focus on partnerships as a means to improve service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The backdrop of evidence of poor outcomes through failure to ensure Aboriginal participation in service design and delivery was also ever increasing.⁷ This context created a significant policy window for change.

At 30 June 2012, there were 17,192 children in OOHC in New South Wales, including 5,991 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who are represented at a rate of 11.7 times that of other children.⁸ In April 2013 there were 10 ACCOs accredited and providing OOHC services for approximately 600 Aboriginal children. Accreditation through the NSW Child Guardian requires agencies to meet specific service delivery standards to provide OOHC services in NSW.⁹

Transition to NGO service provision in New South Wales

OOHC service provision in NSW is changing significantly in response to sector calls for change,¹⁰ with a shift of all statutory OOHC service provision from the FaCS to accredited NGOs. Under the transition, the government is providing \$123 million to NGOs for 3,145 placements for up to 6,800 children.¹¹

The 10-year transition, which commenced in 2012, includes clear direction on the transfer and placement of Aboriginal children.¹² Overseen by a Ministerial Advisory Group (which includes AbSec, non-Indigenous NGOs and government representatives) and supported by the Transition Program Office, the transition requires that 'all new entries and transfers of Aboriginal children must be placed with an Aboriginal agency or an agency that is currently in partnership with an Aboriginal agency.'¹³ 'Partnership' is defined as 'between an Aboriginal agency that plans to provide OOHC placement services and an agency that is already accredited to do so. Each partnership must have the aim of developing the capacity of the Aboriginal agency to become independent and accredited.'¹⁴ To accept all Aboriginal children and young people in government statutory placements the capacity of ACCOs will need to be increased eightfold (a capacity of 3000 placements).¹⁵



The 2009-10 Keep Them Safe annual report described the 2010 MoU as 'historic in its nature ... it has enabled Community Services to achieve a true partnership with the Aboriginal non-government sector. AbSec has been funded to work with Community Services in the development of key service models and programs...and there is a sharing of information and formulation of joint positions.'¹⁸



State-level partnership agreements

In 2008 the two peak bodies for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous child and family welfare NGOs, AbSec and ACWA, commenced a process to develop new Aboriginal community controlled OOHHC services through a partnership-based capacity building model. It seeks to ensure that the transfer of services is not simply a transfer of responsibility, but also supports new ways of work that are effective, culturally appropriate and adequately resourced. The approach emerged from a shared commitment to implement the SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy,¹⁶ which highlights the important roles of non-Indigenous NGOs and government to support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery capacity.

Following the 2008 Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services and the subsequent government response, Keep Them Safe, AbSec and the Department of FaCS signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) (AbSec/FaCS). Importantly, the 2010 and 2012 AbSec/FaCS MoUs also established mechanisms for governance, consultation and collaboration in key areas of capacity building of ACCOs and non-Indigenous NGOs, and 'developing models for effective consultation and service delivery across the spectrum of child protection services'.¹⁷ These MoUs support a strong working relationship between AbSec, the Aboriginal Services Branch and senior staff in the NSW Department. As AbSec explains, the MoU 'has created a more level playing field where we are no longer just reacting to government but planning with government.'

In 2011 FaCS, ACWA and AbSec formed the Ministerial Advisory Group on the OOHHC transition, ensuring that their partnership commitments were reflected in policy development and implementation for the transition. Through this group, state-level partnership agreements were brought to play in a live policy environment with strong Aboriginal leadership through AbSec and resources coming in to drive partnership capacity building activities.

National partnership focus

Several government policy frameworks commit to partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in order to address service gaps. The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) recognises the commitment of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 'to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve the Closing the Gap reforms.'¹⁹ The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 asserts that 'to provide culturally appropriate responses, strategies under the National Framework must be based on partnerships between Indigenous families and communities, and between Indigenous agencies, mainstream service providers and governments.'²⁰ Several of the NIRA service delivery principles for programs and services for Indigenous Australians also promote and support effective partnership development between ACCOs and non-Indigenous service providers. Three NIRA principles reflect a partnership-based approach:

- 'Ensuring services and programs are provided in an integrated and collaborative manner both between all levels of government and between services.'
- 'Ensuring mainstream service delivery agencies have strategies in place to achieve Indigenous outcomes and meet Indigenous needs.'
- 'Supporting the capacity of the Indigenous service sector and communities to play a role in delivering services and influencing service delivery systems/organisations to ensure their responsiveness, access and appropriateness to Indigenous people.'²¹

Policy priorities for partnership development have paralleled and complemented a strong focus on development of integrated and holistic services for children and families.²² At the federal level this has included significant funding for integration focused service models to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs.²³ The policy and program development drive towards integration has highlighted the need for increased attention to partnership processes necessary to enable effective collaboration between ACCOS, non-Indigenous agencies, communities and government.²⁴

What is the capacity building partnership model?

As of February 2013, there are eight partnerships at various stages of development. These partnerships are located in the western and southern regions of NSW, areas historically with unmet service needs. Ongoing capacity-building discussions with communities and agencies are occurring across five other areas.²⁵ The model presented in this brief describes process design, early learning, and projected partnership resourcing and support for these partnerships and further partnerships planned in the roll-out of the OOHc transition.

The capacity building partnership model is one of three approaches developed by AbSec, ACWA and FaCS to build the capacity of NSW ACCOs to deliver OOHc services, noting other strengths-based capacity building supports for developed Aboriginal agencies not requiring partnerships to increase capacity.²⁶

The model involves a partnership between an unaccredited ACCO and an accredited agency, with the primary aim of supporting the accreditation of the ACCO and the transfer of all placements assigned to the partnership to the ACCO once it is accredited. By partnering with an accredited agency, an unaccredited ACCO is able to develop and provide supporting programs, and also support placements in the short term, developing service expertise through supervised work on placements. The accredited agency has an auspice role, and retains responsibility for the provision of OOHc and the authorisation of carers, while simultaneously providing capacity building support for its partner. Where possible, the accredited agency is also an ACCO. On accreditation, the newly-formed ACCO receives the funding, assets and full responsibility for staff and their caseloads assigned to the partnership, including all placements for Aboriginal children in their area of operation. **The final result of the partnership model is two stand-alone and accredited OOHc agencies and increased cross-sector co-operation.**

A crucial aspect of this model is the funded role of an external, well-established Aboriginal organisation as the partnership facilitator. It has a driving role, which includes communication and coordination with government and other stakeholders, facilitation of consultations, development and formalisation of the partnership, and provision of a range of ongoing support and monitoring for the partners as the partnership progresses. Having an established Aboriginal organisation in this role:

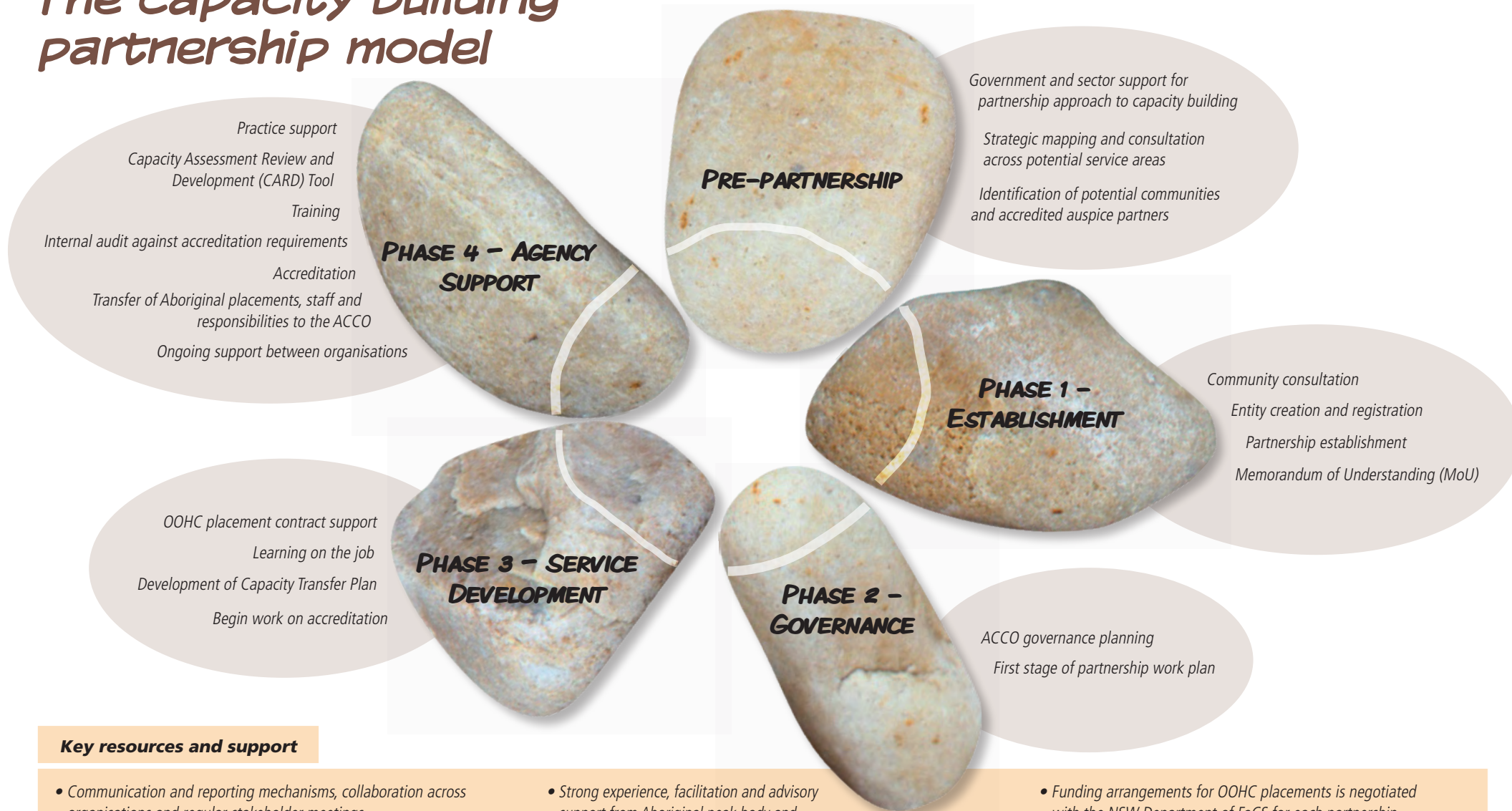
- ensures that the interests of the Aboriginal community are at the heart of all partnership activities;
- increases trust and acceptance of the initiative by Aboriginal communities; and
- increases negotiating strength for Aboriginal communities that have less resources than large mainstream NGO partners.

There are five distinct phases of the capacity building partnership model, each of which place an emphasis on supporting a community-driven, tailored response to local needs and ensuring quality and probity. The rationale and activities for each phase is discussed below and illustrated with examples of the model's tailored application to one of the current partnerships, between the Ngurambang and UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families. This is one of the most established partnerships and is currently within Phase 2 of the partnership model. Importantly, phases in the model are not time-limited, allowing flexibility for the significant time required to build relationships and capacity building plans tailored to the different starting points and circumstances of each community.

"The Final result of the partnership model is two stand-alone and accredited OOHc agencies and increased cross-sector co-operation." – Nick Corrigan, AbSec

***"These partnerships lead to successful capacity building in the Aboriginal out-of-home care sector".
– Angela Webb, CEO AbSec***

The capacity building partnership model



Key resources and support

- Communication and reporting mechanisms, collaboration across organisations and regular stakeholder meetings.
- Funding for Aboriginal partnership facilitator and broker.
- Capacity building from non-Indigenous NGO peak body.
- Strong experience, facilitation and advisory support from Aboriginal peak body and non-Indigenous NGOs for entity formation and MoU drafting process.
- Aboriginal partnership facilitator provides ongoing support, advice, training, monitoring and acts as a communication point for partners and advocate with external stakeholders.
- Funding arrangements for OOHC placements is negotiated with the NSW Department of FaCS for each partnership.
- Resourcing and staffing arrangements are negotiated for each partnership.

Capacity Building Partnership: Ngurambang/UnitingCare CYPF

The partnership operates from the UnitingCare CYPF Dubbo office. Once accredited, Ngurambang will provide OOHC services across three communities.

Aboriginal Organisation (ACCO)

Ngurambang Out Of Home Care Services is an incorporated Aboriginal association, formed by Aboriginal people from three communities of Dubbo, Wellington and Narromine. The Board has representatives from all communities and regularly meets in the three communities.

Partner Organisation (Auspice organisation)

UnitingCare, Children, Young People & Families (Encompassing UnitingCare Burnside & Jaanimili Aboriginal Services and Development Unit) (UnitingCare CYPF) is a leading child and family organisation in New South Wales.

UnitingCare CYPF is the auspice or lead accredited agency for the partnership.



Aboriginal partnership facilitator

AbSec is a not-for-profit incorporated community organisation. The organisation is the peak NSW Aboriginal organisation providing child protection and OOHC policy advice on issues affecting Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities.

As partnership facilitator, AbSec initiated and facilitated the community consultations, brokered partnership discussions and supported entity formation. It will continue to support the partnership through the provision of governance, accreditation and practice advice, training and monitoring, as well as advocacy and communication on behalf of the partnership with external stakeholders.





PRE-PARTNERSHIP

A non-Indigenous organisation's commitment to self-determination does not equate to leaving ACCOs to address community needs on their own.

The practices which most strongly reflect organisational commitment to self-determination are those that contribute to building the capacity and role of ACCOs, and local capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

To streamline the high volume of interest in the partnership model, AbSec established a concurrent process for identifying potential partnership locations and partners. This included: a strategic mapping exercise; a clear policy on appropriate auspice organisations; an online survey of the non-Indigenous NGO sector; and working with FaCS to identify potential community interest and need. This process took place over October 2011–June 2012.

Critical to the development of a partnership are key formative activities led by the partnership facilitator prior to any formal partnership activities. These establish the foundations for the partnership. The partnership facilitator establishes or identifies stakeholder support and resources for the capacity building partnerships, mechanisms for communication and reporting to other key stakeholders, and processes for identifying potential service areas and matching appropriate partner communities and organisations.

The OOHc transition process in NSW illustrates key aspects of this phase, with government and sector support for a partnership approach to capacity building requiring broad discussions, development of stakeholder partnerships to drive the process, and the development of service delivery policies that set out aims, activities and responsibilities of key stakeholders.

This stage is also supported by the partnership facilitator conducting strategic mapping, consultations and surveys across potential service areas, with the aim of identifying potential 'matches' between communities and accredited organisations to address service gaps. Ideally, this process would identify:

- potential service gaps and projected demand
- community service centre boundaries
- cultural and language boundaries
- location of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, their current organisational capacity and interest in partnerships
- location of other existing organisations, their current organisational capacity, plans for growth and interest in partnerships
- existing community interest and leadership on child and family issues
- funding opportunities
- existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community partnerships with government or non-Indigenous NGOs
- the 'right match' between potential partners' aims and capacities
- demonstrated interest and commitment of non-Indigenous agencies to engaging with Aboriginal organisations and communities

- any probity requirements established in partnership with the government or other stakeholders, which may include, for example, principles for the auspice or lead agencies.

AbSec has set out key requirements for a non-Aboriginal organisation to take on an auspice role for an unaccredited Aboriginal agency.²⁷

The auspice organisation must have:

- accreditation to provide OOHc
- commitment to recruitment, employment and support of Aboriginal staff and carers
- understanding of and commitment to Aboriginal placement principles
- demonstrated cultural proficiency and commitment to cultural support for Aboriginal children, young people and families
- demonstrated sound governance and organisational capacity
- child and family focus and commitment
- practical OOHc service delivery expertise
- understanding of and commitment to regulatory compliance by auspice body
- plans to support the auspiced service to achieve accreditation
- plans to support the auspiced service to develop autonomous governance and organisational capacity
- support for transition to autonomous organisational status.

It is also key that the agency supports the position that all Aboriginal children in care should be supported by Aboriginal agencies.



PHASE 1 – ESTABLISHMENT

AbSec did not approach the community with the aim of promoting the partnership model. The consultation focused on primarily identifying community needs and interests.

Non-Indigenous NGOs and local council took lead from the Aboriginal partnership facilitator and the community meetings, and offered support for the process.

Research on partnerships shows that long-term relationship building is best supported when ACCOs make clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work and the ways that non-Indigenous NGOs can support the partnership.
– SNAICC, Opening Doors, 2012

This phase supports long-term relationship building, establishment and the formal recognition of community and partner aims, commitments and responsibilities under the partnership. With the assistance of the partnership facilitator, this phase focuses on comprehensive community consultation and informed decision-making. If a community decides to approach potential partners, this phase also includes the creation or incorporation of an ACCO, partnership brokering by the facilitator and the drafting and signing of an agreement formalising the partnership.

During this phase, the partnership facilitator approaches communities that may be appropriate sites for a new ACCO, to conduct a community-driven and focused consultation process.

This consultation process is characterised by:

- working through existing relationships with community and networks to spread the word about community meetings, organise best locations and times, and encourage community attendance and participation
- initial meetings focus on identifying local service needs and possible ways to meet community needs, interests and the opportunity the OOH transition process presents
- discussions which are driven at a pace set by the community, and facilitated or supported by the partnership facilitator
- community decisions on interest in the partnership model and if so, potential partners
- ongoing support and advice from the partnership facilitator.

Where the community confirms interest in pursuing a partnership with an accredited organisation, the partnership facilitator supports the introduction of potential partners and facilitates partnership negotiations. The mainstream organisation applies independently to the government for funding for the placements and activities associated with the partnership. Although the partnership facilitator plays a role to support the readiness of partner organisations, the government makes the final assessment and determination of whether the partnership is funded.

When the two parties reach agreement on a capacity building partnership, and the government awards partnership funding, the partnership facilitator supports the community to set up an entity and both parties to draft an MoU to articulate and govern the partnership.

Key provisions of the MoU include:

- a clear, shared commitment to achieving outcomes for Aboriginal children through the transition of services to a new ACCO, accredited through the partnership process
- a timeframe for transition, in line with the service agreement with the NSW Department of FaCS, or when accreditation has been achieved
- clear aims, roles, responsibilities, expected outcomes, governance structures and mechanisms for review.

Although agreements in themselves are rarely viewed as driving forces in the development and maintenance of a partnership relationship, participants describe that the processes of relationship building and negotiation that lead to agreement making are critical to both the quality and content of the agreements, and the success of the partnership.

– SNAICC, Opening Doors, p27

Significant attention is needed to ensure the support and dissemination of agreements at different levels of partnership structures. Organisations regularly identify that there are challenges for partnership agreements and the principles that underpin them filtering through from senior levels to staff teams or from central and head office level to regional and local staff working relationships.

– SNAICC, Opening Doors, p 32

Establishing a partnership in Dubbo, Wellington and Narromine

AbSec identified the regional area of the three diverse communities of Dubbo, Wellington and Narromine as a potential site and service gap area. Although historically services had been concentrated in Dubbo, intensive community meetings facilitated by AbSec began in February 2012 with a view to encourage all key stakeholders, existing organisations and community members from across the region to drive the process from the outset.

‘The key selling message for community was that this is your chance to take care of our kids and bring our kids back to our community – what do you want to do?’ - Barry Lenihan, AbSec

After approximately 15 community meetings, UnitingCare CYPF was formally identified and approached as a mainstream NGO partner in October 2012. Informal conversations focusing on values alignment, vision and goals were already underway. These were assisted by UnitingCare CYPF’s strong existing ties to the communities. At this point, meetings began to focus on incorporation of an entity to facilitate a formal partnership.

In collaboration with the Aboriginal Officer from NSW Government, Fair Trading, a model constitution provided by AbSec was considered, adapted and approved by community participants. In February 2013 Ngurambang was incorporated and the inaugural meeting of the Board was held, which included three representatives from each community.

AbSec also worked through a draft MoU provided by another mainstream NGO partner. Both parties to ensure it reflected and supported the specific characteristics and aims of the partnership. This included the clear articulation in the MoU of roles, responsibilities, mechanisms for review and clear acknowledgement of the value that both partners brought to the partnership. The MoU was formally signed in February 2013 after three months of refinement.

“AbSec’s role was one of ensuring balanced and equal interaction, and supporting the integrity of what people really intended – in other words, the motivation behind the partnership. People need different levels of information in different ways – the ongoing role of AbSec allowed this to happen.”

– Barry Lenihan, AbSec





PHASE 2 - GOVERNANCE

As of May 2013, a project manager has been employed by UnitingCare CYPF, and funded for eight months by AbSec. The project manager will support the ACCO board, as well as the gradual establishment of a dedicated workspace for Ngurambang in the UnitingCare CYPF office.

UnitingCare CYPF also elected to revise its internal policies and procedures to ensure they were consistent with the partnership objectives and activities.

Partnership research shows that it is a common and useful practice for collaborative staffing arrangements - such as co-location, shared staff and mirrored staffing teams - to be established in partnerships. These enable linkages, relationship building and learning across organisations.
- SNAICC, Opening Doors, 38

This phase focuses on building and supporting the governance of the ACCO. This is achieved through direct work of the non-Indigenous partner and partnership facilitator with the Board to establish processes, policies and tools that will support good governance and lead the work towards accreditation and other outcomes under the MoU. This may include developing:

- organisational policies and strategic documents that meet all legal and practice requirements
- reporting, monitoring and evaluation processes
- a work plan for all non-OOHC service delivery activities
- business systems and financial management capacity.

The governance development phase overlaps and interacts with all other phases of partnership development. While in the establishment phase the partnership facilitator takes the lead role in supporting the formation of an initial organisational structure, establishment of a board, development of a constitution and registration of the new organisation. The non-Indigenous partner may also be involved to support this process, especially where they have a strong existing relationship with the local Aboriginal community.

Governance capacity building continues during the service development and agency support phases as the board works in partnership with the non-Indigenous agency to achieve accreditation and develop future plans for fully transitioned service operation. Staged increases in governance capacity are supported wherever possible by the ACCO taking on management and operation of other child and family support services that do not require OOHC accreditation. This can also assist the ACCO to develop a more holistic service model and the non-Indigenous partner can support the ACCO in efforts to diversify funding sources and services to better meet the broader range of child and family support needs in the community.

PHASE 3 – SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

"Extremely important – as capacity is developed, clear responsibilities moving from the mainstream organisation to the ACCO – like non-OOHC services, wrap around services, cultural programs, the cultural support workers and so on – it allows the Aboriginal agency to start managing funds and staff and build up slowly". – Peter Jones, AbSec

This phase focuses on planning and development of service provision capacity by the ACCO.

Overseen by the partnership facilitator, concurrent components include:

- the development and negotiation of separate funding and contractual arrangements for placements assigned to the partnership
- ongoing professional development and 'learning on the job' mentoring for ACCO staff about service delivery under the leadership of the auspice organisation
- ongoing provision of cultural advice, and carer recruitment support by the ACCO to the auspice organisation
- local Aboriginal employment and workforce development strategy developed and implemented in partnership
- developing the Capacity Transfer Plan, setting out timelines and mechanisms for review of the staged transfer of responsibility for non-OOHC activities to the ACCO staff and Board
- beginning work towards accreditation and other quality-assurance guidelines for the ACCO
- Further developing the Capacity Transfer Plan to include post-accreditation transfer of activities, resources, funding and responsibilities to the ACCO. This process aims to support seamless transition of service provision, limiting any unsettlement of placements.

For new ACCOs, like any fledgling organisation, establishment costs can be a major barrier to getting the service up and running and surviving early stages of operation. Funding for a partnership project manager within the auspice organisation provides critical support for an ongoing focus on partnership goals. However, partnership funding is predominantly linked to placements on a unit cost basis and there is limited further establishment funding built into the model. Resource and staff-sharing and co-location of services within the partnership can help to reduce start-up costs. There is, however, a significant risk to transitioning to independent service operation where ACCOs lack necessary capital resources, and non-Indigenous agencies lack dedicated-resources for supporting their ongoing development.



Community members from Dubbo, Wellington and Narromine were present to witness the signing of the partnership agreement between Ngurambang OOHC Service and Uniting Care CYPF.





PHASE 4 – AGENCY SUPPORT

"The partnership will also have the ongoing monitoring and Facilitation support of AbSec, which provides flexibility to do really different things in different places and adapt – really building on what works for that community". – Julie Power, AbSec

"ACWA The greatest impact will be Indigenous kids being placed in culturally appropriate settings with agencies that share a holistic understanding that placement is only one, albeit important, piece of a far more complex support network". – Andrew McCallum, CEO

Phase 4 focuses on implementing the workplan and Capacity Transfer Plan, as well as building and evaluating the capacity of the ACCO to meet accreditation requirements and other responsibilities under the MoU.

Activities involve:

- ongoing practice support from the partnerships facilitator and auspice organisation
- the gradual staged transfer of services and staff to the ACCO for service provision
- ACCO use of the Capacity Assessment Review and Development (CARD) tool, guided by the partnership facilitator and the auspice organisation. The CARD is an iterative, ongoing process, which focuses on identifying, responding to and evaluating the ACCO's training or support needs.
- ongoing training as identified by the CARD process
- internal audit of ACCO files against accreditation standards.

Once the ACCO is accredited and all carers are authorised, all Aboriginal placements will be transferred to the ACCO. A transfer of Aboriginal staff, financial, legal, and all other responsibilities and assets assigned to the partnership placements will also occur as agreed by the partners.

The purpose of the CARD framework is to identify and analyse an Aboriginal agency's capacity to deliver OOHC services, and inform the development and implementation of a capacity building action plan.

The CARD framework provides a structure for assessing, developing and reviewing the capacities that an agency needs in order to successfully and sustainably carry out its business. Organisational capacities are what the agency, as an entity, requires rather than what individual staff members need to acquire, or develop, in order to do their job. Through participation in the CARD process, Aboriginal agencies will develop their capacity to achieve and retain OOHC accreditation and build a sustainable independent service.

Managing Risks

While the model has significant potential for building the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service sector through partnerships, there are several potential challenges and risks that may require ongoing monitoring and management. These range from non-successful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and agencies; to lack of genuine readiness of non-Indigenous NGOs to participate as equal partners; and lack of governance or financial capacity within ACCOs to manage the speed of growth.²⁸

Strategies for risk management need careful thought and incorporation into the partnership process. In the capacity building partnership model, the following strategies have been built-in:

- an Aboriginal partnership facilitator that is recognised and has established relationships with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders to provide overall coordination and intensive support for the partnership process
- comprehensive sector engagement and support for the process from the beginning, led by the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous peak bodies
- clear delegation of stakeholder roles and communication strategies and plans, which are detailed in the AbSec/ACWA Project Plan²⁹
- quality assurance through external regulatory processes
- tailored, partnership-specific key documents, tools and processes, including:
 - the MoU, which describes clear roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for review;
 - the Capacity Transition Plan which outlines milestones for accreditation and transition of service provision;
 - partnership workplans which detail how the Capacity Transition Plan is to be achieved; and
 - regular points of evaluation and review, potentially through the Capacity Assessment Review and Development (CARD) tool.

"The legal hook of accreditation is key to this process. It creates obligations that have to happen; these are not loose partnerships, as the model is driven to reach this point of accreditation, a point which is also based on a test at the end – quality has to be proven".

– Peter Jones, AbSec

"The auspice arrangements ensure that children will always have quality placements with an accredited OOHC provider throughout the development of the ACCO. Even if the ACCO did not receive accreditation, the children would be assured a stable placement".

– Nick Corrigan, AbSec

The perspectives and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities are represented more strongly in policy reform and service development through the shared understanding and support of mainstream partners.

This enables innovative practices and ultimately better outcomes for our children.

– SNAICC, Opening Doors p77

"The importance of partnerships with genuine non-government providers is important in assisting Aboriginal communities in self-determination".

– Angela Webb



Signing the partnership agreement between Ngurambang OOHAC service and Uniting Care CYPF.

Outcomes and broader application

Potential outcomes

The potential outcomes for the partners, stakeholders and ultimately, children and their families, are numerous, with service expertise, relationships and individual, organisational and community capacity developed throughout all phases of the partnerships.

Key intermediate outcomes envisaged through the partnerships include:

- increased capacity and resources for Aboriginal community-controlled child and family service delivery
- local Aboriginal workforce development and economic participation
- enhanced culturally appropriate, locally responsive and quality services for Aboriginal children, their families and carers
- strong, collaborative relationships for ongoing support and shared work between ACCOs, non-Indigenous agencies and Aboriginal communities.

Crucially, potential outcomes for families and vulnerable children extend beyond the immediate capacity building activities or service delivery of the partnership. This strong base of sustainable relationships and culturally strong service capacity creates the opportunity for significant long-term change for the child and family service sector and the Aboriginal communities that it supports. Envisaged longer-term outcomes include:³⁰

- a reduction in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering the OOH system, resulting in considerable cost savings to the NSW Department
- increasing levels of engagement with families
- increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people restored to families
- better compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people better supported culturally while in care

- increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster and kinship carers
- better supported Aboriginal carers, resulting in higher retention rates of experienced carers
- a reduction of the number of Aboriginal children and young people placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

"It is not about just delivering another service. It is about the kids, and making kids safe. This business is close to Aboriginal people. It is pure; it is about the heart."

– Barry Lenihan, AbSec



"What will be most important about the success of the process, and we should be rightly judged on this, is that kids remain connected to family and community and their life trajectory is measurably improved and their improvement can be benchmarked against the general population". – Andrew McCallum

Broader application

While only the earlier phases of the partnership model are currently underway, the activities to date highlight several key characteristics that could be applied more broadly to partnerships seeking to enable community leadership and service outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These include:

- strong support for the process from all key stakeholders in the partnership: community, NGOs, government and regulatory bodies
- a clear commitment by all key stakeholders to the development of strong Aboriginal community controlled services for service provision to Aboriginal children and families
- Strong processes embedded from the outset that ensure that the community is supported to lead the partnership, and the partnership is relevant and responsive to local community contexts
- an experienced, state-wide Aboriginal peak body with a funded position for leading, brokering and facilitating the process towards partnership goals
- an emphasis on good governance and accountability mechanisms including shared workplans, an agreement negotiated to identify shared goals and commitments and ongoing review and evaluation, which then inform training and other capacity building responses
- a flexible, tailored approach to building community and ACCO organisational, financial and governance capacity.

The capacity building partnership model has the potential to extend beyond ACCOs and non-Indigenous OOHC organisations in NSW. Indeed, in NSW, as elsewhere, capacity building models need to drive a more holistic approach, building community capacity for child and family support with a focus on universal support and early intervention to prevent children coming into out-of-home care. This is strongly in line with the national policy priority for re-directing resources to early intervention support that heals and strengthens families.³¹ Already in pockets around NSW, through trial and pilot programs, capacity is building for Aboriginal community-controlled service delivery in broader

family support areas including: intensive family preservation and reunification support; Aboriginal family decision-making conferences; cultural advice in child protection decision-making; and integrated early years and family support centres. If these initiatives could be combined with the state-wide OOHC capacity building approach the benefits for could be multiplied.

This brief has outlined key underlying drivers, principles and strategies of the NSW approach to building capacity through partnerships. These provide a starting point for considering the potential for its adaption to diverse service contexts across Australia. This model provides a clear map of the development and implementation of a large-scale partnership approach that is designed for flexible application to different local community contexts. It demonstrates what the rhetoric of partnerships means in practice and offers inspiration and know-how. This model shows great promise as an evidence based, community-driven vehicle for new innovation and renewed commitment to ensure the safety and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Endnotes

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