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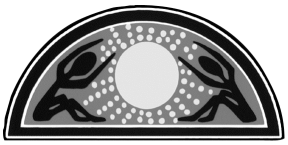
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

OPENING DOORS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs

April 2012



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Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

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A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction, aim and approach

Increasing access to and engagement with child and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples is vital to address the significant poverty and disadvantage they experience. In this paper SNAICC builds upon previous research that highlights the barriers for families in accessing services and recognises two key approaches to increasing their access and engagement:

- working within a cultural competence framework; and
- engaging in effective partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

SNAICC contends that genuine and respectful partnerships between mainstream service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) have multiple benefits including:

- cultural competence development for mainstream service providers;
- governance and service capacity development for ACCOs;
- development of shared capacity to respond to community needs; and
- development of individual and community capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in areas including workforce and community leadership.

This is consistent with broad-level government policy frameworks that acknowledge the need for, and support, a partnership-based approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations for targeted services.

In order to advance efforts to achieve these potential outcomes through partnerships, however, SNAICC identifies the need to unpack what genuine partnership requires at different stages of partnership development, operation and management; the resources and practical support that are required to enable effective partnerships; and the practices that contribute to 'good practice' partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers.

In this paper SNAICC uses a case study analysis approach to explore these issues, focusing in particular on practical steps that mainstream service providers, ACCOs and government can take to develop and support genuine partnerships, thereby increasing the quality and choice of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Interviews with service providers have contributed to nine different case studies that demonstrate success in the development and management of good practice partnerships, and inform this paper. The full case studies are included in Appendix A and a summary version in Appendix B.

2. Partnership principles

The current paper draws, from good practices identified in the case studies reviewed, the core principles that underpin genuine and successful partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. These are:

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

These principles are interconnected and interdependent, with the case studies demonstrating that they must all be present and integrated within each partnership stage to achieve potential partnership outcomes. This paper contends that these principles form the bedrock of genuine and successful partnerships, and that they have major implications for partnership development, operation, management and resourcing.

3. Partnership development

(a) Relationship building and development

The case studies reveal that a significant commitment to and investment in developing relationships of trust is necessary to enable genuine and respectful partnerships. This is especially important for mainstream service providers that need to re-establish trust that has been damaged by the history of mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Practices contributing to positive relationship development include: mainstream partners making long-term commitments to relationships; establishing a strong community presence and participation; and tailoring support to community need based on requests from ACCO partners.

(b) Negotiation and agreement making

Formalising partnerships through agreements and incorporating partnership processes and activities into the policies and procedures of partnering organisations are recognised by participants in this research as important practices. Participants

identify that these practices are necessary to: ensure that partnerships are sustainable; clarify commitments and resource allocation; and promote mutual accountability for shared objectives. Agreements rarely drive the relationship and their quality reflects the processes of relationship building, and open and honest negotiation that underpin the agreement. Partners recognise that special attention is needed to incorporating ACCO perspectives in agreements, including recognition from mainstream partners of the important leading role of ACCOs in identifying needs, and designing and delivering responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

4. Partnership management

(a) Ongoing partnership management

Participants identify that regular and open communication is vital to the ongoing management of a partnership. The ability to raise and work through challenges and issues in a frank and open way both enables and reflects a respectful working relationship. Informal and flexible planning processes in partnerships allow space for discussion and planning at the community level to feed into and guide partnership work. Staffing arrangements that facilitate linkages, relationship building and learning across organisations have been described by participants as centrally important, and formed an element of practice for almost all partnerships within the case studies.

(b) Resourcing and facilitating partnerships

The case studies suggest strongly that a significant investment of time and resources is required to enable effective partnerships. Efficiency benefits of partnerships tend to be long-term and result from good process. SNAICC identifies a widely recognised need to fund process elements of partnership development and management. SNAICC also identifies that a number of models have shown promise in taking a partnership-based approach to service integration and providing dedicated resources for partnership development and management. Within the case studies considered, these models have provided platforms for relationship development. Partnership facilitation and brokering roles have been critical to the success of these approaches. SNAICC notes, however, that the efforts of 'facilitating partners' in developing cultural competency and respectful relationships have also been critical to enabling successful and genuine participation of ACCOs within partnership structures.

(c) Monitoring and evaluation

No partners in the case studies reviewed have conducted a significant review of partnership relationships and their impact on outcomes, which SNAICC argues, again, reflects the lack of resources available to support partnership process elements. Evaluation was conducted of service outcomes for services delivered in partnership. ACCOs commonly identify significant differences in cultural understanding of, and approaches to, evaluation between ACCOs and mainstream partners. These differences create challenges for evaluation of partnership projects.

Practices that include significant participation of all partners in the design of evaluation processes have shown promise for overcoming challenges.

5. Partnership outcomes

(a) Collective innovation and advocacy

This paper highlights various ways in which partnerships provide forums for developing shared understanding about community needs, as well as responses that are effective and culturally appropriate. Shared understanding has enabled the development of joint strategies and new service models and approaches. Resourcing genuine partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers creates space for the development of local, responsive strategies. Participants further identify that partnerships provide opportunities for larger mainstream partners with significant influence to 'back-up' or advocate on behalf of their ACCO partners. In this way, mainstream partners have acted as conduits to represent 'on-the-ground' realities in higher-level policy debate.

(b) Cultural competency development for mainstream service providers

Participants identify both the need for a commitment to developing cultural competency to enable partnership with ACCOs, and the significant opportunity that exists for mainstream service providers to develop cultural competency in partnership with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The approach to developing cultural competency cannot be a finite checklist, but requires a broad focus on the attitudes, behaviours and policies necessary for an organisation and its staff to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. It is critical that the approach includes recognition of, and value for, the cultural knowledge and skills of ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that are crucial for appropriate service provisions for children and families. The case studies also reinforce that a commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples underpins culturally competent practice.

Practices identified by participants that contribute to cultural competency for mainstream service providers through partnership include: local cultural awareness training with direction, guidance and/or participation of ACCO partners; integrated staffing arrangements that provide opportunities for shared learning; employment of local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff by mainstream partners; development of organisational cultural competency frameworks; and cultural advice services provided by ACCO partners to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

(c) Capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations

It is important to recognise that multiple capacity development benefits accrue for both partners in all the case studies considered, and many of the capacity benefits for mainstream partners are reflected on in relation to cultural competency in the previous section. The focus in this section is on governance and service delivery

capacity development for ACCOs through partnerships. Mainstream participants in this study identify that capacity challenges for their ACCO partners largely relate to the extent of community need and the large service delivery demands placed upon those organisations. Capacity building is strongly recognised in the case studies as enabling an enhanced role for ACCOs and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Mainstream partners have provided significant support to build capacity for ACCO partners in areas including: training and local workforce development; mentoring of staff; governance systems development; and support for obtaining sustainable funding.

Successful and respectful partnerships regularly have a strong focus on a transfer of resources, leadership and responsibility for service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to ACCOs. In line with the principle of self-determination, participants highlight that this transfer should happen at the request of ACCOs and accompanied by support to ensure sustainability. Partnerships that participated in this study commonly featured a commitment to building Aboriginal service capacity for the long-term, while working together to address immediate needs and meet expectations.

6. A promising approach

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat, New South Wales (AbSec) and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) have commenced a process for developing new Aboriginal community-controlled Out-of Home Care (OOHC) services through a partnership-based capacity building model. The approach shows significant promise for building state-wide capacity for the provision of OOHC services by ACCOs. Promising aspects include: an Aboriginal peak body leading the process to ensure appropriate service provision for Aboriginal children and families; a funded role for partnership brokering and facilitation; agreements negotiated to identify shared goals and commitments at the outset; and a tailored approach to ensure relevance to local community contexts.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The case studies reviewed reveal good practices that support partnerships, but also the ongoing struggles of both partners to realise the good practice principles within their services and in engagement with each other. Implementation of the principles is inhibited by deeply embedded approaches that take time, commitment and persistence to change, as well as inconsistent government structures and demands, and an absence of resources required for their realisation.

Ultimately, practice demonstrates that where the eight principles identified are embedded in the structures, processes and practices of partner organisations, supported by upper management and consciously filtered through to staff at other levels of service delivery, they contribute to improved service development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Importantly, this paper unpacks key practices that illustrate *how* services can reflect these principles in their practice. These practices provide clear guidance to inform

and support partnership development for children and family service providers. A matrix that describes clearly the practices that promote each of the identified principles at different stages of partnership development is included in Appendix D.

The practices and principles identified also highlight important priorities for government policy development to promote good practice partnerships in the child and family service sector that are detailed in the included recommendations. Government action is required in key areas including the identification of remaining capacity gaps and development of responsive programs that utilise the benefits of partnership, and research and monitoring of innovative partnership practices. SNAICC also recommends various strategies for the Government to strengthen and enable the facilitation of good practice partnerships, including through regulation, service contract models, provision of relevant resources and support for services to engage in genuine partnerships, and enabling a sufficient level of cultural competency across the sector. SNAICC also considers the next three-year plan for the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children 2009-2020 as an opportunity to capitalise on the potential of good practice partnerships. In particular, recommendations strengthen existing initiatives aimed at producing strong outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through culturally appropriate and responsive integrated services.

1. INTRODUCTION

Engagement with child and family support services is critical to strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and improving life outcomes for vulnerable children experiencing significant poverty and disadvantage. National statistics indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be at high risk of experiencing multiple disadvantages, with significantly poorer health and wellbeing indicators than the general population, including vast overrepresentation in the child and family welfare and juvenile justice systems.[1] The national move towards a public-health model of engagement promotes access to services that seek to prevent family breakdown and child protection intervention and intervene early to support families, reducing the emphasis on statutory systems that are reactive and overburdened.[2]

Statistics indicate a low national level of access to support services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families,[3] who services regularly identify as 'hard-to-reach'.[4] In SNAICC's view this is more properly characterised as a service system that presents significant barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement; barriers that can be overcome by service adaptation and quality service provision. The literature details multiple types of barriers, including historical, cultural, social, geographical and practical.[5] Addressing these barriers and enabling support for children and families requires significant focus on strategies for increasing access to and engagement with child and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

SNAICC identifies that two key means to increase access to and engagement with children and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are:[6]

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[1] Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP). (2009). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Canberra: Productivity Commission.

[2] Referred to generally in Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-2020.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

[3] Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 10.

[4] Cortis, N., Katz, I., & Patulny, R. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 26: Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*. Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

[5] For a comprehensive review of the literature on service barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families refer to: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010a). *Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 7-9.

[6] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC.

- working within a cultural competence framework; and
- engaging in effective partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

Based on all available evidence, SNAICC contends that genuine and respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) and mainstream service providers provide opportunities for mutual capacity building benefits. These benefits include:

- cultural competency development for mainstream service providers;
- governance and service capacity development for ACCOs;
- development of shared capacity to respond to community needs; and
- development of individual and community capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in areas including workforce and community leadership.

Community-based and controlled organisations overcome many identified barriers to access,[7] and provide multiple benefits to children and families including culturally appropriate care and support.[8] In SNAICC's view these organisations, because they are driven by and directly accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, are best placed to represent the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Evidence strongly suggests that ACCOs are also best positioned to deliver services that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.[9] Capacity development for ACCOs enables them to take a leading role in community-based community development approaches that respond to community-identified needs. These approaches contribute to social and economic empowerment and align with current government policy priorities that highlight the importance of 'Indigenous-led and managed solutions.'[10]

SNAICC and others argue that while mainstream service providers have a significant role to play, they cannot replicate the benefits of community-led and culturally appropriate service provision through ACCOs.[11] In some cases Aboriginal and

[7] Ibid, 2.
[8] Higgins, J. & Butler, N. (2007). Characteristics of promising Indigenous out-of-home care programs and services. *Promising Practices in Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Carers, Children and Young People*. Melbourne: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) & Australian Institute of Family Studies.
[9] Bond, D. (2000). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services National Report*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 13-14; Trigwell, J. (2000). *Childcare models and options in rural and remote Indigenous communities.* Perth: Western Australian Council of Social Service; and Fasoli, L. & James. R. (2007). Researching Remote Aboriginal Children's Services: it's all about rules. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8 (4).
[10] Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-2020.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 28.
[11] SNAICC (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 23. See also Sims, M. (2011). *Early childhood and education services for Indigenous children prior to starting school.* Resource Sheet 3, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Torres Strait Islander families will choose to access mainstream services; and in many cases an existing lack of capacity for ACCOs means that vital services can only be accessed through mainstream service providers. It is widely accepted that a focus on cultural competency development for mainstream service providers is necessary to enable them to undertake this role effectively,[12] and that a focus on respectful partnerships with ACCOs is a cornerstone of culturally competent organisational practice.[13]

SNAICC commends broad-level government policy frameworks which acknowledge the need for and support a partnership-based approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. 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.'[14] 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.'[15]

SNAICC recognises that many of the *NIRA Service delivery principles for programs and services for Indigenous Australians* also promote and support effective partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. Three principles identified in the *NIRA* that reflect a partnership-based approach (see section 3 below) are:

- 'Ensuring services and programs are provided in an integrated and collaborative manner both between all levels of government and between services.'[16]
- 'Ensuring mainstream service delivery agencies have strategies in place to

[12] SNAICC (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 11; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010a). *Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 9; Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 23-28; Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

[13] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 24.

[14] Council of Australian Governments. (2008). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap).* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

[15] Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-2020.* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 28.

[16] Council of Australian Governments. (2008). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap).* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, D12 (c).

achieve Indigenous outcomes and meet Indigenous needs.'[17]

- '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.'[18]

Key government initiatives that seek to implement these policy priorities include a significant focus on integrated service systems and integrated service delivery hubs. These include, for example, the 38 Children and Family Centres (CfCs) currently being established and the Communities for Children strand of the FaHCSIA Family Support Program. It is recognised that effective integrated service systems require governance structures and support for establishing community-based partnerships.[19]

Given the major policy focus on partnership development, SNAICC identifies the need for:

- unpacking what genuine partnership requires at different stages of partnership development, operation and management;
- resourcing and practical support to enable effective partnership development, operation and management; and
- identification and promotion of practices that contribute to genuine and respectful 'good practice' partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers.

In this paper SNAICC explores the practical steps that mainstream service providers, ACCOs and government can take to develop and support genuine partnerships, thereby increasing the quality and choice of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Existing partnerships that demonstrate key good practice principles, and enjoy a level of success in building the role and capacity of ACCOs and strengthening cultural competent practice for mainstream service providers, are used to inform analysis and promote learning from good practice. The outcomes of this paper have implications for mainstream service providers, ACCOs, government service providers and policy makers.

The body of this paper is divided into three parts focussing on partnership development, partnership management and partnership outcomes. Sections 3 to 7 explore key principles that underpin good partnership practice and present key practices. Appendix D provides a matrix that aligns partnership principles against stages of partnership development and key practices that promote the identified principles. In section 8 the paper draws together some key conclusions and recommendations to better recognise, assist, promote and ensure genuine

[17] Ibid, D13 (b).
[18] Ibid, D13 (g).
[19] Moore, T. & Skinner, A. (2010). *Background Paper: An integrated approach to early childhood development.* Melbourne: Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital, 10.

partnerships based on good practice principles.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a case study analysis approach to identify and explore good practices in existing partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. As the focus of the paper is on highlighting good practice, the partnerships selected demonstrate a level of success as defined in the criteria below.

Criteria used for the selection of partnerships for participation in the study include:

- At least one ACCO and one mainstream or government service provider is involved in the partnership.
- The partnership contributes to service delivery within the child and family service sector.
- The approach to partnership is recognised as demonstrating significant alignment with previously identified principles of effective partnerships.[20]
- The partnership is recognised as contributing to outcomes that enhance engagement and access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or is commencing or piloting services with that identified aim.
- The partnership contributes to governance and service delivery capacity for ACCOs and to organisational cultural competency for mainstream service providers.

Partnerships were selected to represent a range of urban, regional and remote service contexts and included examples from four different Australian jurisdictions. The identification of partnerships was based on consultation with the SNAICC National Executive and membership, SNAICC's partner organisations, and key child and family service leaders across Australia.

Although the focus is on partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers, government partners are included in some case studies. This recognises that government departments have roles in direct service provision and case management, and sometimes undertake these roles in partnership with ACCOs. It also recognises that government departments play a key role in funding and supporting partnership structures and services delivered by partnerships.

SNAICC studied nine partnerships for this paper, including approximately 15 service delivery organisations or government departments. Interviews were conducted separately with all partners and relevant documents were collected and reviewed for the purposes of this paper. SNAICC developed case studies for each partnership that were used for analysis of good practice. The case studies are included in Appendix A. Summary case studies have also been developed for broader application and accessibility of information about the partnerships and are included in Appendix B.

[20] See section 3 below.

Interviews did not take a highly-directed question and answer approach, but rather used a 'topics for discussion' document to guide a conversation and provide participants with the opportunity to tell the story of their partnerships with reference to key aspects and stages of partnership development, management and review. This approach was necessary given the flexible and dynamic nature of partnerships that did not often conform to a particular structure or stage-based process of development. While a structured understanding of partnerships is useful and necessary for effective policy analysis, this did not always fit easily with the way participants understood and experienced partnerships. The approach was also designed to be non-confrontational and non-interrogative to promote open sharing about relationships that captured the experience of the participants in partnerships. In this way participants, who were considered in many cases to be leaders in partnership development, were able to take an active role in defining the scope of the research as it progressed. The *Topics for Discussion* document, included in Appendix C, was developed with reference to key aspects and principles of partnership previously identified by SNAICC.[21]

This paper describes good practice primarily drawn from the knowledge and wisdom of service leaders with significant experience in partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts. Direct quotes and descriptions are used to promote learning and good practice based on their experiences. The paper draws on past literature review by SNAICC and leading cultural competency framework documents that address partnership principles and practice.[22] It draws on this base in the analysis of practice-based understanding of effective partnership principles and how they can enable positive partnership relationships that contribute to better service outcomes.

[21] See: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC.

[22] See: Ibid; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.* Melbourne: SNAICC; Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA; and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008*). Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework.* Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

3. PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ORGANISATIONS

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) has succinctly described widely identified pre-requisite principles for partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. SNAICC believes that these principles, described in the boxed text below, both inform and are reflected to a large extent in the successful partnerships reviewed in this paper.

FUNDAMENTAL UNDERSTANDINGS FOR BUILDING GENUINE AND RESPECTFUL PARTNERSHIP

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) has worked in partnership with leading mainstream service providers, Berry Street and MacKillop Family Services, to produce the *Building Respectful Partnerships* resource 'to describe culturally competent and respectful practice across an organisation.'[23] They believe the approach described can 'improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families and strengthen partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations.'[24] The resource describes partnerships as ' a cornerstone of cultural competency' and identifies fundamental understandings that are pre-requisite to developing genuine and respectful partnerships with ACCOs. The 'fundamental understandings' below are extracted from *Building Respectful Partnerships*:[25]

Understand that Aboriginal Organisations are Different
They were established through political action for Aboriginal voices to be heard. They have broad objectives. In addition to providing services for Aboriginal children and families, objectives include cultural advancement, community development, self-determination, Indigenous rights, redressing the disadvantage that Aboriginal people face and continuing to provide space for Aboriginal voices.

Understand that Aboriginal Professionalism is Different
Aboriginal professionals incorporate knowledge and understandings of history and culture into service delivery. Many are part of the local Aboriginal community and provide local knowledge and understanding and connection to culture and community.

Support Self-Determination for Aboriginal People
Respect the principle of Aboriginal organisations as the first choice for services for Aboriginal people. Take opportunities to support Aboriginal organisations to grow and develop through financial support and assistance with capacity building. Never compete with Aboriginal organisations for resources to deliver services to

[23] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 1.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 52.

Aboriginal children and families.

Understand that Aboriginal Families Will Require Mainstream Services
Combine this understanding with the knowledge that these services can only be effective if they undergo capacity building to be culturally competent.[26] Even the most culturally competent mainstream organisation cannot replace Aboriginal services.

Understand the Importance of Establishing Partnerships
Such partnerships should be based on equity and cultural respect. They should not just be a way for non-Aboriginal service to 'tick the Aboriginal box'.

The current paper draws, from good practices identified in the case studies, core principles that underpin genuine and successful partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. These are:

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

The case studies reflect these principles at the different stages of partnership development, operation and management, and embed them within partnering organisations' processes, systems and practices. The principles are interconnected and interdependent, with the case studies demonstrating that they must all be present and integrated within each partnership stage. This paper suggests that these principles form the bedrock of genuine and successful partnerships, and that they have major implications for resources and time that partnerships require, as well as knowledge, skills, and attitudes for staff of partnering organisations. These principles are linked to good practices identified at the end of each section in the body of this paper and analysed in more detail in the conclusion.

[26] Bamblett, M. 2007 in Ibid, 52.

4. PROMISING PRACTICES: PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

This section highlights the key successful practices that participants identified in the development phase of partnerships, including relationship building, negotiation and agreement making. Partnership challenges and barriers that indicate important areas of focus for support and improved practice are also identified..

4.1 Relationship building and development

4.1.1 Relationships of trust

Effective partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations require a considerable investment in developing relationships of trust.[27] This is a two-way process, though significantly influenced by the justifiable mistrust that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have developed of mainstream service providers and government as a result of a history of mistreatment and failed policy initiatives. This is particularly so for children and family services that had a role in the devastating policy and actions that contributed to the Stolen Generations. In 2008, the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, recognised in his Apology to the Stolen Generations the need to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to rebuild trust lost through 'the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss.'[28] Re-establishing trust requires a significant and continuing commitment from mainstream service providers and government, and is a process which takes a long time.[29]

Successful relationships identified in the case studies considered were based on long-term commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.[30] These are focused on relationships first and foremost, and particular projects and activities as manifestations of those relationships. The partnerships studied indicate that trust is established where:

- A partner organisation has a strong presence in the community and

[27] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services.* Melbourne: SNAICC, 15; and Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 8.
[28] Rudd, K. (2008). Apology to Australia's Indigenous People. *House of Representatives Official Hansard.* No.1, 2008. Canberra: House of Representatives, 167-173.
[29] Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 27.
[30] Long-term relationships were existing or envisioned in all case studies.

communicates regularly and openly with the partner organisation.[31]

- A partner brings ideas, skills and resources to share, but is open to different and culturally appropriate ways of working.[32]
- A partner makes a commitment to partnership beyond a particular project or activity and 'keeps coming back'.[33]
- A partner who is also a funder allows open discussion of funding possibilities and does not threaten withdrawal of funding.[34]
- A partner is patient and respectful of community needs and priorities, and so waits for the community to respond and request support, rather than imposing solutions.[35]

An Aboriginal organisation describes their experience of this trust:

> *We can have the open and honest discussions now… We are not uncertain that they will come back and say, 'fine we will take your funding away.'*[36]

A mainstream service provider explains that while they are firm on what they see as important in a partnership, and may withdraw from a specific partnership structure or activity where there is a lack of transparency or participation of everyone in decision-making, '*We wouldn't walk away from our relationship [with the Aboriginal organisation].*'[37]

4.1.2 Community consultation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations commonly identify that cultural competency of mainstream partners is critical to effective community engagement. Cultural awareness of staff impacts on initial and ongoing relationship development with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[38] These concepts are defined and explored more fully in the focus on cultural competency in section 6.2 below. Significant time is required for consultation and listening to the community, especially in the early stages of

[31] For community presence, see especially case studies in regional and remote locations, including: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC. For reference to regular and open communication see all case studies.
[32] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[33] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[34] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[35] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[36] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.
[37] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 94.
[38] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.

partnership development.[39] An ACCO describes how this happened effectively:

> *There was a different attitude by [them] coming into the community. You need knowledge of Aboriginal history … To take time to learn about people and really treat people with respect and as human beings … She always said how much she learnt from us and that she could never understand and talk to the community the way we did. She gave the space for brainstorming and thinking things through from a community perspective.*[40]

Participants identify a need for both partners to establish relationships with and provide adequate information to children and families that engage with a service that is provided in partnership.[41] As one ACCO providing early childhood education and care services explains:

> *We need to have our parents engaged. If they don't think [a partnership project] is good for their children then we will go with them. They are the first teachers and we are the next step to guide them through.*[42]

An openness to adapt programs and approaches to local cultural needs and perspectives is vital to beginning conversations.[43] Ensuring the relevance of planned activities to the community is important.[44] These considerations are explored further in the focus on cultural competency in section 6.2 below.

Including ACCOs from the outset of a project, activity or process that is focused on services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is recognised as important to show respect for the role of ACCOs in the community and enable a genuine partnership:

> *to have an equal partnership we have to be together making the decisions at the very start, not for us to come in later on.*[45]

One identified practice is for partners to provide information to communities and undertake consultations jointly, demonstrating that they are undertaking the work *together* from the start.[46] In some cases it is clearly identified that mainstream service providers need to consult with Elders and other community members outside of, and with the advice and support of, ACCO partners.[47] ACCOs are accountable to their communities and often require time and space for their own

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[39] See especially: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[40] See for example: Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165.
[41] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[42] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 127.
[43] See for example: Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 127.
[44] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 113.
[45] Cast Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[46] See for example: Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 4.
[47] See for example Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 131; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 101.

consultation processes before committing to partnership activities.[48] Building processes together that take into account these requirements is critical to the effective participation of an ACCO and a respectful partnership.

4.1.3 Having something to offer and responding to requests

Mainstream partners identify that an important aspect of relationship building with ACCOs is setting out clearly what they have to offer and the support that they can provide.[49] This enables the organisation to understand the supports available, but ensures that requests for support come from ACCOs and are based on community need. ACCOs have a role to be clear about their needs, perspective and vision for their work with children and families, and the ways in which mainstream partners can support.[50] One staff member of a mainstream service provider explains that expression of a clear vision of what was needed by the partner organisation has enabled him to respond:

> *Without that I could just be well meaning and trite, but there were some tangible things that we could start doing and I think that made a significant difference.*[51]

4.1.4 Maintaining and sustaining relationships

High staff turnover for both ACCOs and mainstream partners is regularly identified as a significant barrier to developing and maintaining effective relationships.[52] Further, many organisations identify that partnerships are driven and supported through the commitment of particular workers and the personalities of specific people that make effective relationships possible.[53] Partnerships can be vulnerable to changes in staff which effect relationships and commitments.

However, many also identify that where structures and systems are built into a partnership and relationship development work happens between the organisations, long-term sustainability of partnerships is possible.[54] In addition, partnership work on specific programs and activities is enabled by long-term

[48] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116-117; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165; and Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 131.
[49] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur and; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[50] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 112; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 153.
[51] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 153.
[52] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[53] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[54] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 6: AbSec; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.

respectful relationships between organisations.[55] This can be driven by different imperatives, as illustrated by the examples below.

In a partnership where two recent employees have sought to establish a relationship in family violence work, the ACCO describes:

> *[They are] such a strong advocate and support for Aboriginal business…I'm sure their absolute respect for the business [we] undertake has provided the platform for this to go forward.*[56]

The recent employee of the mainstream service provider identifies that the opportunity to partner is enabled by the culture of the organisation, an 'ethos' which operates at different levels, and with the CEOs playing a significant leadership role,

> *they have such respect for each other and that clearly filters down and influences how the rest of the organisation is expected to do business in the Aboriginal space.*[57]

A participant in another partnership identifies that maintaining effective partnership relationships is vitally important in regional locations where there are a limited number of service providers and breakdown of relationships leads inevitably to an inability to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provide services.

> *We can't afford not to get on because we don't have multiple organisations up here to work with, and all of us are very aware of that, that we all need to work together because we don't really have any other options.*[58]

4.1.5 Staffing arrangements for relationship development

Partnership-focused staffing arrangements, including co-location, staff sharing, staff secondment and facilitation roles contribute significantly to both relationship development and operational supports for partnership. Specific staffing practices that promote respectful relationships include:

- Co-location, especially in initial stages, that promotes conversation and shared understanding; with a focus on co-location and joint work at the site of the ACCO which demonstrates respect for their role.[59]
- Employment of local Aboriginal staff by non-Aboriginal partners can promote a focus on cultural awareness and demonstrates a commitment to

[55] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[56] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 154.
[57] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 154.
[58] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 95.
[59] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.

the community.[60]

- Staff secondment from non-Aboriginal partners, usually at a cost to that organisation's immediate effectiveness, shows a value for what they can contribute to and learn from ACCOs.[61]
- Staff sharing creates significant two-way learning where a shared staff member leads capacity development and incorporates cultural perspectives in both organisations.[62]

Operational benefits of such staffing arrangements are discussed further below in section 5.14.

Key Practices – Relationship Building	**Key principles reflected through practice**
1. Long-term commitment to a relationship with organisations and communities, rather than to particular projects or time-limited activities.	Principles: 1 and 4
2. Mainstream partners developing a strong physical presence with ACCO partner and in the broader community, through, for example, regular phone calls, visits to ACCO office and consultation with Elders and other community members, with advice or support from an ACCO partner.	Principles: 1, 2 and 6
3. Mainstream partners bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCOs to express needs and request support based on community need.	Principles: 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8
4. Mainstream partners open to understanding and applying their ideas, skills and resources in different and culturally appropriate ways.	Principles 2, 5, 7 and 8
5. ACCOs making clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and the ways that mainstream partners can support.	Principles: 3, 4, 5 and 6
6. Including ACCOs from the start of a project	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6

[60] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[61] See especially Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[62] See especially Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG.

or process, which reflects respect and value for their role.	
7. Willingness of mainstream services to invest and engage in issues important to the local community, expressed through the ACCO.	Principles: 1, 2, 3 and 8
8. Ongoing time invested in personal relationships at all levels of partnership structures.	Principles: 1 and 6
9. Introducing staffing structures and arrangements that provide opportunities for shared learning and relationship building.	Principles: 1, 5 and 6
10. Upper level management leading by example, with conduct explicitly communicating to staff role and importance of partnership and its implications.	Principles: 1, 5 and 6

4.2 Negotiation and agreement making

4.2.1 Formalising partnerships

Most partnerships included in the case studies have formalised the relationship to some extent through a process of agreement making. Some organisations involved in more informal partnerships also express a clear interest and vision to do so.[63] The variety of documents that reflect partnership agreements and inform partnership work in the case studies explored in this paper include:

- Memoranda of Understanding, Partnership Agreements and Agreed Protocols: non-legally binding agreements that commonly define the purpose, principles and activities of a partnership.[64]
- Service agreements that reflect funding and service relationships with government or NGO funders, and relationships between organisations delivering joint or shared government funding.[65]
- Staff position descriptions and work plans that relate to shared staffing and secondment arrangements in partnerships.[66]
- Legislative frameworks that incorporate partnership principles or direct how

[63] See for example: Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 114.
[64] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 6: AbSec; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[65] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[66] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.

organisations interact with each other and government; for example, legislative consultation requirements of the Victorian Department of Human Services with Aboriginal agencies in relation to child protection cases.[67]
- Organisational policies and procedures that incorporate aspects of partnership agreements, responsibilities that arise from the partnership, and partnership processes within operations; for example, practice instructions for service staff.[68]

The boxed text below provides an example of a partnership agreement that the participating partners consider to be effective.

FEATURES OF AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG) have a long-standing relationship that has developed over time through activities including 'cultural awareness education, governance training, staff secondments, partnerships on particular programs, and education and training of staff.' Currently GEGAC and UCG collaborate significantly around the development and delivery of early years services, including the development of the Bairnsdale Children and Family Centre. A full description of the partnership is included in Case Study 1 in Appendix A.

GEGAC and UCG describe that their agreements are based on and emerge from the relationship between the two organisations and identified community needs. The negotiating process has been straightforward because of the strong relationship and shared vision, and it is 'only the dollar amounts that sometimes cause tension.'[69] They identify some key features of their agreements that are important to practice as:

- clearly describing the commitments of both organisations working in partnership;
- not restraining the flexibility of day-to-day work and the ability to respond to needs that present;
- being part of a process to ensure the collaboration is 'more strategic, systematic and a basis for future growth of opportunity'; and
- creating sustainability, such that 'work can continue even if there is a changeover of staff.'[70]

The current formal agreements between GEGAC and UCG are structured in terms of an overarching partnership agreement and four individual memoranda of understanding relating to specific partnership activities identified in the 'partnership

[67] See Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[68] See for example: Victorian Government Department of Human Services (DHS). (2007). Advice Paper: Responding to Aboriginal Children. *Protecting Victoria's Children: Child Protection Practice Manual*. Melbourne: DHS; described in Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[69] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93.
[70] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93.

action areas' section of the partnership agreement. There is also a separate memorandum of understanding that the partners have together with Gippsland Lakes Community Health and East Gippsland Shire Council for the establishment of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre.

The key elements of the partnership agreement are:

- an introductory description of the history of the partnership and the nature of the collaboration;
- an acknowledgement of the role of the agreement in making the collaboration 'more strategic, systematic and as a basis for future growth';
- a statement of the broad shared vision of the organisations;
- a list of specific partnership action areas;
- a description of the partnership management structure, including individual responsibilities, meeting arrangements, and partnership review;
- an acknowledgement that the partnership needs to be embedded in organisational practice;
- a procedure for settlement of disputes;
- a policy statement about complaints; and
- a brief description of the terms of the agreement including: timeframe, review processes, modification of action areas and, reporting to governing boards.

Common elements of the memoranda of understanding which accompany the partnership agreement include:

- statement of shared vision;
- project background;
- project scope;
- project timelines;
- project deliverables; and
- project administration and resourcing.

Administration and resourcing arrangements are detailed in the memoranda of understanding and include agreements relating to:

- shared staffing positions
  - location of position
  - hours of work and division of time
  - rates of pay
  - supervision and support
- project resources
  - funding allocation and schedule of payments
  - wages
  - physical resources, for example: office space, vehicles, computers
  - other program costs, for example: training and meeting costs.

4.2.2 The process of negotiation

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.[71] One participant describes that developing and maintaining trust is the starting point for agreeing on partnership activities:

> *We come from a position of trust. Often we will run with things and start before we have the documentation together if the need is there and we just trust that we are going to work it out as far as resources.*[72]

Where partnership relationships are required, for example through joint funding that must be delivered in partnership, participants identify that this can assist in bringing organisations to the table and opening up conversations.[73] However, where partnership relationships are 'forced,' outcomes will be variable and highly dependent upon the level of trust that exists or is developed between the organisations:

> *What is important is that the agreements are being developed as a result of a 'good process that strengthens the relationship' rather than having a situation where 'one party feels the partnership has been imposed.'*[74]

It is clear that, regardless of circumstances in which the partnership arises, partners cannot skip the component of trust building. Open and honest discussion has been critical to effective negotiation of working relationships.[75] Having the hard conversations and being able to 'keep having them' is important. This requires '*a capacity to keep the conversation going … and not dig in.*'[76] Platforms for these discussions are also vital to identifying partnership opportunities and enabling the negotiation of partnership work. These platforms can include regional sector focused service provider committees and integrated service delivery networks and alliances.[77] A participant who has a facilitation role for a multi-partner alliance structure describes that multi-partner negotiations can be particularly challenging, and require letting go of individual needs, and must be based on a commitment to work together towards shared goals:

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[71] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 155.
[72] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93.
[73] See especially Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance. For reference to the benefits of participation in multi-agency forums, see also Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH.
[74] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 156.
[75] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[76] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 4.
[77] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.

You've got really respectful leadership, you've got really good trust with each other, people get that sense of common concern, and we're in this together, this is a shared model, the more we play together the better it will be. Yes we'd like to retain some of our own individuality, however, at least where we can we'll be open and honest with each other.[78]

4.2.3 Including ACCO perspectives

Participants recognise the need for mainstream partners to focus on how the perspectives of ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are included in negotiations.[79] Participants regularly highlight that processes of negotiation and relationship building are intrinsically linked and must happen together and over time to establish trust. This includes the process described in section 4.13 above of mainstream organisations building an understanding of the local community through direct interaction; engaging in open dialogue with ACCOs, Elders and others on the issues; putting ideas on the table; and providing ACCOs with the opportunity to respond and negotiate partnership activities based on community need.

(The) programs were written because the Aboriginal people have been saying to us, now we want you to problem solve, this is the next problem, how do we do this, and we say this is what we can do.[80]

They really wanted input from local communities, wanted it to be based on relationships with them … It is about getting a consensus on what communities want, not asking around until you hear the message you want to hear.[81]

Partners regularly describe that partnership work is enabled by a common objective to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.[82] This shared goal guides and informs negotiations. Although this objective is common to most who work in the child and family service sector, participants identify that enabling respectful relationships with ACCOs requires recognition from mainstream partners of the important leading role of ACCOs in identifying needs, and designing and delivering responses.[83] One participant describes that a respectful negotiation requires:

That the mainstream organisations work closely with them and are committed

[78] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 148.
[79] See for example: Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 127; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 167; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.
[80] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 127.
[81] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 167-168.
[82] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 3; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 3; Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 4; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 3.
[83] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99; Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 112-113; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 155.

to 'Aboriginal business', but appreciate that they can't take this on without [the ACCO's] lead.[84]

4.2.4 Accountability and sustainability

Agreements create negotiating strength for smaller partners, who will often be the ACCOs, partnering with larger mainstream organisations and also with government.[85] This can be especially important where the partner is also a government or non-government funder with power to provide and withdraw funding support to the ACCO or alter the terms on which it is provided.[86] Agreements that reflect the interests of both parties create a level of accountability; the opportunity for partners who would otherwise be in a weaker negotiating position to hold partners accountable to their commitments:

That's about saying that it's formal, it's legitimate and it's things that both of us have signed onto. It's not just about saying this is how we're supposed to do things, we're actually saying that this is what we agreed to and we both have some responsibility for it.[87]

Agreements are recognised as important for clarifying commitments and ensuring they are followed through. This is particularly important where partnership activities impact on resource allocation, staffing and operational aspects of organisations.[88] Formal documents that incorporate partnership work into the policies, procedures and operations of partner organisations are vital to ensuring sustainability of partnership activities. One mainstream service provider explains:

[partnership processes] are not going to just drop off; they will be embedded in the manuals, in the policies, in the procedures and that will be the glue that will hold it together.[89]

Another mainstream service provider explains that the Memoranda of Understanding are vital to ensure that the partnerships can continue even if there is a changeover of staff:

It's that 'do no harm' work. Don't put something out there that will fall to pieces if someone leaves.[90]

Other participants identify that there is a need to bring a focus to formalising

[84] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 148.
[85] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka, and the focus on future agreement making in Case Study 6: AbSec.
[86] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[87] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[88] See for example: Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 155; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93, 101-102.
[89] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 159.
[90] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93.

agreements to ensure the future sustainability of partnership work.[91]

4.2.5 Agreement at different levels of partnership structures

The partnerships considered in this paper highlight that significant attention is needed to the development 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 from senior levels to staff teams or from central and head office level to regional and local staff working relationships.[92] This has been recognised as a considerable challenge in relation to cultural advice services for child protection cases.[93] For example, in Victoria there is frustration that within the context of a highly supportive legislative and policy environment, compliance with consultation requirements with Aboriginal agencies at key decision-making points remains poor in some regions.[94] It has been suggested that local level Memoranda of Understanding between Child Protection and ACCOs could assist by not only describing roles and responsibilities, but by addressing principles for, and ways of working together, in each region.[95] It is also suggested that these should be incorporated within key performance indicators for regional directors to promote accountability.[96] In New South Wales a similar cultural advice service is under development that gives significant attention to ensuring effective partnership relationships between ACCOs delivering the service and government Community Service Centres:

> *We need to have something more formal in terms of agreement, something at the local level that staff can refer back to when there are issues.*[97]

The AbSec/ACWA pilot project for developing the capacity of Aboriginal out-of-home care agencies, described in more detail in Section 7 and in Appendix A, demonstrates a significant commitment to partnership at all levels. The approach includes a focus on partnerships between peak bodies, with the relevant government department, and facilitated partnerships between service organisations at the community level.

Key Practices – Negotiation and Agreement Making	**Key Principles Reflected Through Practice**
1. Open and honest discussions, working through the hard issues despite the	Principles: 1, 5 and 6

[91] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 114-115; and Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 134.
[92] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 6: AbSec; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[93] See Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case Study 6: AbSec.
[94] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[95] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[96] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[97] Case Study 6: AbSec, 139.

challenges. Partners do not 'dig in' and are prepared to let go of individual needs to achieve shared goals.	
2. Mainstream partners listen to and incorporate the perspectives and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in agreements. This includes recognising the ACCOs' important role in identifying, communicating and responding to community needs.	Principles: 2, 3 and 8
3. Negotiations are based upon a shared objective to improve outcomes for children and families.	Principles: 4 and 5
4. ACCO partner has opportunity to express core objectives, which are then incorporated into the partnership.	Principles: 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7
5. There is a focus on formalising agreements to clarify commitments, roles, management structures and processes, and resource allocation, to strengthen mutual accountability for agreed objectives, and to ensure a greater level of partnership sustainability.	Principles: 1, 5, 6 and 7
6. Policies and procedures incorporate partnership agreements and processes, as well as institutional knowledge of partnerships, to prevent 'drop off' when staff are busy or there is staff turnover.	Principles: 1, 5 and 6
7. Agreements are not overly prescriptive, but allow for sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to arising needs.	Principles: 1, 2, 4 and 8
8. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities, facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7

5. PROMISING PRACTICES: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT

This section highlights the key successful practices participants identify in the management of partnerships, including ongoing management practices, funding and resourcing of partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation. Partnership challenges and barriers are identified that indicate important areas of focus for support and improved practice.

5.1 Ongoing partnership management

5.1.1 Communication

Organisations interviewed identify that a strong presence in the community and consistent contact with an ACCO that enables regular face-to-face communication is important in partnerships.[98] This approach is viewed as enabling informal interaction which is necessary and beneficial for partnership work:

> *Regular informal chats were the main points of communication. Real casual stuff. When things arise, you talk.*[99]

> *…because when you need to do something, you can just talk instead of trying to get through our systems, which are really hard to break into sometimes, to be able to get to the right person and get the right outcome for the client.*[100]

Face-to-face communication and strong community presence are viewed as practices that promote effective consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that are affected by partnership work.[101] Practices that reflect community presence include, for example, visiting the community regularly if based outside of it,[102] participating in community meetings, events and celebrations,[103] and conducting and participating in community information sessions and meetings related to partnership activities.[104] One participant describes that through meeting and talking to families who access services:

> *we have clearer pathways to what each stakeholder wants and what we hope*

[98] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[99] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 169.
[100] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 156.
[101] See especially: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[102] Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC; and Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 128-129.
[103] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 98.
[104] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 128.

to achieve by giving each person a voice.[105]

Participants recognise that an important aspect of a respectful relationship includes a willingness on the part of mainstream service providers and government to come to and undertake meetings at the offices of ACCOs. One participant describes this as a significant recent change of approach that has addressed an imbalance of power within relationships for ACCOs:

> *Historically you'd see Aboriginal organisations having to leave the office, go and sit in these clinical governmental processes and be…overwhelmed with the amount of non-Aboriginal processes.*[106]

5.1.2 Addressing challenges and disputes

Participants commonly describe that the ability to raise and work through challenges and issues in a frank and open way both enables and reflects a respectful working relationship.[107] Although most partnership agreements contain dispute resolution procedures, these have rarely been engaged in a formal way because issues are worked through proactively as they arise.[108] One ACCO describes that in partnerships there is a need to be attentive to individual staff relationships:

> *You've got to work at them and watch them very closely and check in that everybody is okay, and deal with the issues that arise rather than just put them away and hide and hope they will go away because they won't, they'll just fester and build and grow.*[109]

This attentiveness is necessary at all levels on which a partnership operates, and should include a focus on managing relationships and working through disputes between service delivery staff as well as at the more senior executive levels. In effective partnerships, participants recognise that staff will feel comfortable to raise concerns and address issues:

> *Because their workers felt so comfortable within the organisation, staff would come up and say I have concerns about this, this needs to change. This is very rare in this kind of organisation. And that was cultivated. The benefits are obvious. It was responsive, it was solid.*[110]

Participants describe that the style of communication is important, and that issues are best dealt with face-to-face, or on the phone if necessary, but never by email

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[105] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 129.
[106] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 148.
[107] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 94-95; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 106-107; Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116 and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 170.
[108] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 94-95; and Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 105.
[109] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 95.
[110] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 169-170.

which should only be used 'to move things along timeline wise.'[111]

There is an additional layer of complexity in dispute resolution where one partner is a funder in the relationship. Partners identify trust that raising concerns and speaking openly will not impact funding support as necessary to ensure an effective and more equal working relationship with the funded partner.[112] One ACCO explains that they are able to raise issues with their partner and funder openly because:

> *They know that our intentions are to do the best we can for our community and we know that they are here to support us if we need it.*[113]

5.1.3 Planning in partnership

Partnerships within the case studies commonly include planning processes that are significantly informal and flexible.[114] Participants consider these arrangements necessary and important to partnership planning that is dynamic and responsive to need.[115] As explained by one participant:

> *I think a lot of the great work comes out of that actual practical walking alongside and negotiating step-by-step … you're just going together walking the track rather than sitting down first and saying we're going to do a, b, c and d.*[116]

This approach to planning in partnership is described as flexible rather than loose: *We were not sticking to detail … it was a relationship built on trust and respect, it was not about legally binding contracts and outcomes.'*[117] This is about ensuring the partnership can be renegotiated '*where new needs are identified'* or '*to respond to specific issues or the realities of the time.'*[118]

One ACCO describes a process that supports effective planning in partnership:

> *I set down a budget of what I need, she sets down a budget based on the money available and then we talk together and look at a compromise. Within that we also look at what projects we have run, what has been successful, achieved outcomes and what hasn't and then we reflect the next phase based on that.*[119]

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[111] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 94.
[112] See especially Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[113] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.
[114] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[115] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[116] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 93.
[117] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 170.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 117.

Flexible planning processes can allow space for discussion and planning at the community level to feed into and guide partnership work,[120] as one participant highlights:

> *providing [them] with flexibility in relation to how they operate is important so that decisions can be made at the community level.*[121]

ACCOs describe that this is important to the way they operate because an ACCO is a part of the community and not the community as a whole. ACCOs explain that they can only represent the community to the extent that they consult and listen to community needs.[122]

Other planning processes identified as supporting effective partnership work include:

- a partner providing support for the development and review of an ACCOs strategic plan;[123]
- broader sector committees and integrated service delivery platforms providing forums for shared, strategic and long-term planning.[124]

Having and naming a vision can be vital to enable effective planning in partnership that is directed towards achieving that vision. Participants describe that leaders in both ACCOs and mainstream service providers have a role to play in developing and articulating a vision that provides direction.[125] Two examples illustrate:

> *A shared vision, having 'somewhere you want to go'…is also a critical element, including having someone within the partnership who can articulate the vision and help push towards it.*[126]

> *People always say that partnerships have to have a vision, and in the end those things are really critical, because that's what keeps you at it…you don't have to have everything locked up, but you need to be on a journey, and you need to be keeping on reflecting on that.*[127]

Participants discussed this issue as important to facilitating successful partnerships at all stages of partnership development, operation and management. Within some of the partnerships studied a clear vision to improve service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families has enabled partners to develop new

[120] See especially Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[121] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.
[122] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 117. See also: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[123] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 117.
[124] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance.
[125] See especially: Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[126] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 147.
[127] Ibid.

and innovative service delivery models.[128]

5.1.4 Shared learning and staffing arrangements

Staffing arrangements that enable linkages, relationship building and learning across organisations have been described as centrally important by, and formed an element of practice for, almost all partnerships within the case studies.

Staffing arrangements that have contributed to effective partnership work are described below:

- **Co-location** of staff has proved effective for building relationships, ease of communication, undertaking mentoring and support roles and, reducing costs through shared infrastructure.[129] ACCOs emphasise that there should be a focus on co-location at the offices of the ACCO as this is important to maintaining independence when working with a larger NGO or government partner, and is a way of showing respect and value for the role of the ACCO in the partnership.[130]

- **Shared staff** will usually be employed by one partner but work a part of their weekly load for the other partner by agreement between the organisations.[131] Shared staff have been identified as making a critical contribution to cross-education, sharing skills and knowledge between partner organisations. One partnership describes that a shared staff member works 'fluidly' across the two organisations and takes a further role as an advocate for families with both the ACCO and mainstream service provider.[132]

- **Short-term secondment**: One partnership provides the example of a short-term secondment arrangement where a senior manager of the mainstream partner was seconded to the ACCO for a period of 12 weeks in the early stages of partnership development. This served a purpose 'to develop systems, reporting mechanisms and referral processes that were complementary' and 'to develop understanding around how [we] could fit in with the way [they] needed to do business'[133] Another partnership provides the example of a secondment intended to fill a staff capacity gap for an ACCO with a clear vision that the ACCO would employ their own staff member for the position in the future.[134]

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[128] See for example: Case Study 6: AbSec; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[129] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 120; Case Study 6: AbSec, 142; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 151; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 170.
[130] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[131] See for example, Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[132] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97.
[133] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 153.
[134] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.

- **Mirrored staffing teams** have been established in an Aboriginal peak body and a government department for the development and management of two pilot service models.[135] This staffing structure has 'promoted collaborative work between staff on project teams that go across agencies' and is described as 'encouraging more equal working relationships between staff.'[136]

5.1.5 Joint staff training and stakeholder information sessions

Three key practices are identified by participants as promoting effective partnership through training and information provision for staff, community members and stakeholders:

- Staff of partner organisations undertake training jointly to develop relationships and shared understanding.[137]

- Staff training is delivered and/or designed jointly by staff of partner organisations.[138]

  We always did training together; it was always a common focus on how we work together. Whenever we do regional training, we always make sure that it's us and the Department together.[139]

- Community and stakeholder information and consultation sessions are conducted jointly by staff of partner organisations.[140]

Further training practices that relate specifically to developing cultural competency in partnership are discussed below in section 6.2.

5.1.6 Information sharing between partners

Partners note that a failure to fully share relevant information between organisations is a weakness of some otherwise effective partnerships.[141] Participants identify that failures to share relevant information can go beyond legislative privacy constraints and can be linked to a 'reluctance…to let go of power in the relationship.'[142] One ACCO describes that this requires them to take a 'proactive role to find out what is happening with a case, rather than information

[135] Case Study 6: AbSec, 138.
[136] Ibid.
[137] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[138] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[139] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[140] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[141] See for example: Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; and Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[142] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.

being provided when it should be.'[143]

In other partnerships open sharing of information is recognised as a strength:

> *This exchange became a culture of how we worked together. When I was there, there was no holding information, there was lots of informal engagement about everything, and mutual support and assistance.*[144]

ACCOs identify that the implications of not sharing information can limit their ability to support families appropriately and provide effective services.[145]

Key Practices – Ongoing Partnership Management	**Key Principles Reflected Through Practice**
1. Mainstream partner has consistent contact with the ACCO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to create opportunities for regular informal interaction and communication. Examples include, regular visits to the community, participation in community meetings, events, and celebrations, and community information sessions on partnership activities.	Principles: 1, 6, 7 and 8
2. Open and honest discussions that address concerns, issues and disputes as they arise. These are conducted face-to-face, on the phone if necessary, but never by email.	Principles: 1, 5 and 6
3. Planning is informal, flexible and ongoing, ensuring that the partnership is dynamic, and responsive to needs and opportunities. Partners trust each other enough to allow flexible working arrangements and 'walk together'.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6
4. Planning is directed towards a strong vision that is clearly articulated and agreed by ACCO and mainstream partners.	Principles: 2, 4, 5 and 6
5. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and	Principles: 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7

[143]Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[144] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 166.
[145] Described in: Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 106; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.

stakeholder information sessions.	
6. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams, contribute to relationship building, shared learning and collaborative work.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8
7. Proactively share relevant client and case information within privacy legislation constraints.	Principles: 1, 5 and 7

5.2 Resourcing and facilitating partnerships

5.2.1 Resourcing for partnership work

Partnerships are identified as increasing efficiency through resource and information sharing, and preventing service duplication.[146] However, efficiency benefits tend to be long term and result from stages of relationship development, service linking and service integration that are highly resource and time intensive. Participants describe:

> *Achieving things in partnership takes time. To make partnership work you have to be able to meet and talk things over. It's a challenge to find the time for those meetings.*[147]

> *It's hard to schedule in the time that you need, that's a bit unstructured, to be able to just dream about what you could do…I made some decisions and dropped some things off. It has a cost.*[148]

> *There needs to be a greater recognition of the complexities of partnership work and the true amount of time required for this approach to be effective.*[149]

Participants recognise that funding models that predominantly value short-term service outcomes encourage a focus on immediate service provision. This short-term focus excludes adequate attention to the long-term relationship development and management that is required to enable effective partnership work. There is a clear need for introducing ways of placing a 'value', from a funding perspective, on partnership relationships which can lead to medium and long-term service

[146] Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*. Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 14.
[147] Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 106.
[148] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 157.
[149] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 100.

outcomes:

> *If you don't have someone resourcing it, it drops off when we are all busy and we are all going to continue to be busy…We need to have…legitimate time devoted to the executive meetings, the operations meetings, that are just about the relationship.*[150]

A lack of resourcing for partnership development and management is further reflected in the reality that none of the partnerships reviewed have undertaken a significant review or evaluation that has a focus on aspects of the partnership relationship itself, not just the substantive outcomes of partnership work.

Mainstream partners and ACCOs emphasise the need for funding arrangements that create space for partnership work. One participant explains:

> *If it was more flexible and longer-term timelines then we would be able to probably engage a lot more families than we are…better outcomes could be achieved if funding for partnership work was pooled and flexible, rather than separated into many smaller parts for specific projects.*[151]

Many participating organisations, including mainstream partners, recognise that there is a role for large mainstream service providers which have a significant capital base to share resources with ACCOs in partnership and transfer resources to ACCOs.[152] A staff member of a mainstream service provider comments:

> *I think there are a lot of resources in the sector that could and should go to Aboriginal organisations…I think there are a lot of resources that mainstream services have got that should go to Aboriginal controlled organisations and then they would have a better chance, given the scale of their task.*[153]

Participants explain that this is about viewing resources in the sector as community resources to meet the needs of children and families, developing shared capacity between organisations and ensuring that ACCOs have access to adequate resources to enable effective and culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.[154] As one government representative comments, it is important to:

> *make sure that the resources going to mainstream can be equally accessed by Aboriginal organisations, so that a client has a choice of going to an Aboriginal organisation or accessing a mainstream service or using the Aboriginal*

[150] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 157.
[151] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 101.
[152] See especially Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, and the positive outlook for mainstream participation in capacity building without financial benefit motivation in Case Study 6: AbSec, 142.
[153] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 160.
[154] See Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.

organisation to access the mainstream on their behalf.[155]

Short-term government funding commitments create challenges for partnership sustainability as organisations identify that, regardless of the organisational commitment to work together, a lack of security around funding can place limits on the extent of that commitment.[156] In describing an otherwise successful and robust partnership relationship, one ACCO comments:

> *You can have all the strengths of partnership you want, but when organisations are programmatically funded, you're only as strong as the partners, and the funding, and the commitment around you.*[157]

Another describes:

> *None of our funding agreements are long term, they are all one year. So it is really hard to build a sustainable program and service when you go from one year to the next. That has been the hardship for us all.*[158]

The clear and significant challenges and deficiencies that participants identify in relation to resourcing for partnership work highlight that this is an area which requires significant policy development focus. Though partnerships included in the case studies have enabled a level of success in partnership through commitment, sacrifice and innovative practices, in SNAICC's view, if successful partnership approaches are to be undertaken more widely, the supportive environment needs to improve. This includes a need for attention to funding targeted for partnership development, management and review, and the development of partnership models that support partnership processes. The following section highlights models that have demonstrated success or shown promise for enabling genuine and well-resourced partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers.

5.2.2 Promising partnership-based service integration and partnership facilitation models

Service systems in the child and family service sector have lacked support for the development of governance structures that encourage partnership development and funding for partnership facilitation roles.[159] A number of models have shown promise for taking a partnership-based approach to service integration and providing dedicated resources for partnership development, including partnerships that engage ACCOs. A full review of these models is beyond the scope of this paper,

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[155] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 160.
[156] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 114; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 159.
[157] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 159.
[158] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 114.
[159] Moore, T. & Skinner, A. (2010). *Background Paper: An integrated approach to early childhood development.* Melbourne: Centre for Community Child Health, The Royal Children's Hospital, 10.

but they are reflected here to the extent that they have been viewed as enabling and supportive structures for the case study partnerships. These include:

(a) the Victorian Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Team) initiative;
(b) the Communities for Children (CfC) strand of the FaHCSIA Family Support Program; and
(c) the pilot capacity building through partnerships approach being developed in partnership between AbSec and ACWA in New South Wales.

Participants working with these models recognise that partnership facilitation roles have been key to enabling effective partnership work.[160]

(a) Child FIRST

Child FIRST is part of the Integrated Family Services model in Victoria and provides intake, assessment and case management services, with the aim of limiting Child Protection involvement with children and families wherever possible. Each Child FIRST service within Victoria sits within a Child and Family Service Alliance; a governance structure joining together registered family service providers, the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) and other stakeholders within a given catchment area. These alliances are intended as a platform for integrated service delivery.[161]

This model has shown promise for engaging Aboriginal organisations and improving service delivery for Aboriginal families. ACCOs have viewed partnerships to be effective where mutual benefit has accrued in areas including cultural competency, joint service delivery (including secondary consultation and advice from ACCOs), and shared training and organisational support.[162] However, in some Alliances ACCOs perceive cost to outweigh benefit and reflect that 'issues for the Aboriginal community are rarely discussed, few (if any) referrals were received from Child FIRST and there was a sense that they did not feel they had a valued and respected role in the Alliance.'[163] This raises a series of important partnership gaps concerning the good practices detailed in the earlier sections of this paper.

The 2011 evaluation of Child and Family Services Reforms, which reviewed the initial implementation stage of Child FIRST in Victoria, identified the importance of project officer roles to facilitating effective partnerships:

> *For many Alliances, the capacity to engage in partnerships has been facilitated by access to project-officer support. Project officers add value by acting as a shared resource…In Alliances where this role is in place, there is greater capacity for catchment planning and data analysis, stronger support for key governance meetings, and access to an independent conduit that is able to*

[160] See especially Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance.
[161] KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services: Final Report*. Melbourne: KPMG and Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 25.
[162] Ibid, 47-48.
[163] Ibid, 47-48.

broker relationships and negotiate to achieve an outcome in the common interest.[164]

The report identifies that these roles are funded from, for example, pooled network funding or co-contribution of agencies and require further investment.[165]

An Alliance Project Manager, working for an Alliance that includes the strong participation and perspective of an ACCO, describes the importance of the facilitation role in keeping diverse and complex interests in mind and constantly 'trying to listen and understand.'[166] Facilitators have a role to:

Keep the helicopter view all the time, and…see all the different pressures and how they're all working. But then you try and do something about it together.[167]

An ACCO engaged in the same and other Alliances explains the important role of the structure for building relationships with mainstream service providers and advancing their role and perspective. The ACCO believes that this contributed to an increased focus on effective culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal families.[168] The structure has enabled the ACCO to build understandings with mainstream partners that have resulted, for example, in a consultation and allocation support role in relation to Aboriginal families as well as in the development of a proposal for an Aboriginal-led and managed Child FIRST provider. Pooled Alliance funding has enabled flexible allocation of funds, for example, in the initial establishment of an Aboriginal Liaison Worker role to support the Alliances. It is important to note that the ACCO believes it has had to advocate strongly for a role within the Alliances, rather than the important role of ACCOs being initially recognised within the integrated service model.[169]

(b) Communities for Children

The Communities for Children (CfC) strand of the FaHCSIA Family Support Program supports early intervention and prevention services for families with children up to 12 years. In each of the current 45 CfC sites, an NGO facilitating partner has a brokering role to engage local organisations in providing services for children and families. CfC has aimed to increase service coordination and collaboration through a partnerships-based approach.[170]

The 2009 evaluation of CfC provided some significant conclusions on the success of

[164] Ibid, 32.
[165] Ibid, 32.
[166] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 149.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance.
[169] Ibid.
[170] National Evaluation Consortium. (2009). *Evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 19.

the partnership model and its contribution to service coordination. These included:

- Specific funding for coordination activities was critical to successful collaboration.[171]
- The model worked well because it brought people together around an important community issue and promoted complementary work rather than competition between agencies.[172]
- The facilitating partner role was 'instrumental' to collaboration through establishing consultation and communication processes and working through issues.[173]
- 'Relationships took considerable time to establish…They required a significant investment of time and resources.'[174]
- Local facilitating partners were thought to have a better understanding of community needs than government.[175]

The evaluation described the importance of having facilitating partners who are 'well-known and accepted within the broader community, that invest time in developing relationships with other community organisations, and that acknowledge and respect other organisations.'[176]

Four partnerships participating in the case studies were specifically engaged in activities supported through CfC.[177] Facilitating partners highlighted the importance of CfC to enable partnership work:

> *The Communities for Children program was a major instigator… 'It was the whole reason we came up here… Having facilitating partners lets it be so flexible in being able to respond to community needs.'*[178]

> *[CfC] gave us an opportunity to really strengthen the work that we were doing with [the ACCO] because it provided a considerable amount of resources and we could negotiate how we could use those resources to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children.*[179]

An ACCO funded through CfC describes that their relationship with the facilitating partner has been more successful than direct relationships with government and that through CfC *'FaHCSIA have put in a middle man which acts as a buffer and support.'*[180]

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[171] Ibid, 24.
[172] Ibid, 24.
[173] Ibid, 24.
[174] Ibid, 25.
[175] Ibid, 36.
[176] Ibid, 36.
[177] See Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[178] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 113.
[179] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 91.
[180] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.

In these examples, however, it is notable that the facilitating partners were recognised as either already having a high level of cultural competency or as needing to develop cultural competency before relationships were successful. In one case, a facilitating partner experienced significant challenges in developing relationships before taking steps that included the employment of local Aboriginal staff and cultural awareness training for staff.[181] A 2009 review of service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families supported through CfC found that increases in the number and scope of available services did not necessarily lead to corresponding increases in access for families.[182] The review concluded that this 'was apparent when mainstream programs did not develop strategies for including Indigenous peoples and communities.'[183] In the partnerships considered in this paper, CfC has provided a vital platform for relationship development, but the efforts of facilitating partners who have focussed on and developed cultural competency and respectful relationships have also been critical to enabling successful partnerships with ACCOs.

(c) AbSec/ACWA capacity building project

The AbSec/ACWA capacity building project provides a promising example of a strong Aboriginal organisation taking a role in partnership facilitation and brokering agreements between large mainstream service providers and Aboriginal communities for the development of new services in partnership. This approach is described in detail below in Section 7.

(d) Cultural competency within integrated service delivery and partnership-facilitation models

SNAICC considers that these examples highlight the broader need for a focus on cultural competency and Aboriginal community leadership within partnership-based integrated service delivery and partnership facilitation models. Learning from practice highlights that this should include a focus on incorporating the perspectives of ACCOs in partnership structures, and supporting ACCO leadership within partnerships that respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs. This is in line with community-development principles which recognise that effective and sustainable service provision requires 'whole of community involvement, utilisation of local knowledge, local resources and local personnel, and adopting a holistic approach to planning and development of projects in order to guarantee ownership.'[184] A significant role and participation of ACCOs in integrated service delivery systems values the strength of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs. SNAICC believes that investigating service integration models which promote this role is an important

[181] Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[182] Flaxman, S., Muir, K., & Oprea, I. (2009). *Occasional Paper No. 23: Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services.* Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), 10.
[183] Ibid.
[184] Burchill, M., Higgins, D. J., Ramsamy, L, & Taylor, S. (2006). "Workin' together": Indigenous perspectives on community development. *Family Matters (75),* 59.

area for further research and policy development.

Key Practices – Partnership Resourcing and Facilitation	**Key Principles Reflected Through Practice**
1. Allocate resources to partnership development and management processes, acknowledging the time and resources partnership requires.	Principles: 1, 4, 6 and 7
2. Longer term, flexible government funding commitments and models, which enable partnerships and contribute to sustainable outcomes.	Principles: 1, 2, 4 and 6
3. Government children and family support programs specify and support roles for ACCOs and mainstream partners in a partnership model, where mainstream role is necessary.	Principles: 2, 4 and 7
4. Develop funded facilitation roles that assist in brokering relationships, managing partnership structures and supporting partnership development, including within integrated service delivery models.	Principles: 1, 6 and 7
5. ACCOs and culturally competent mainstream organisations and workers undertake facilitation roles that assist in incorporating the perspective of ACCOs in partnership relationships and multi-partner structures.	Principles: 2, 6 and 7
6. Funding for service delivery in partnership is pooled and flexible, enabling collaborative and creative responses to community needs.	Principles: 3, 4, 7 and 8
7. Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen the ACCO's role and capacity.	Principles: 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7
8. Integrated service delivery systems	Principles 2, 3, 4 and 7

articulate the significant role of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs, and incorporate resources and timelines that enable their effective participation.	

5.3 Monitoring and evaluation

5.3.1 Monitoring and evaluation in partnership

ACCOs commonly identify significant differences in cultural understanding of, and approaches to, evaluation between ACCOs and mainstream partners that create challenges for evaluation of partnership projects.[185] This is often described as the difference between an Aboriginal focus on qualitative feedback, as opposed to quantitative, 'data driven' systems of evaluation that are acceptable to mainstream service providers and government.[186] There is a clear tension in partnerships as to whether this represents a weakness in evaluation capacity of ACCOs or a different and culturally appropriate approach.[187]

Practices that have addressed tensions and contributed to effective evaluation of partnership activities include:

- Shared development of evaluation frameworks, ensuring that the indicators of success are mutually agreed.[188]
- Jointly developing reporting requirements and processes with an ACCO who is a funded partner to ensure that they are relevant and not too onerous.[189]
- Mainstream partners providing support for building evaluation capacity, including developing data collection and recording processes jointly with an ACCO.[190]
- Aligned reporting requirements where an ACCO and a government service report in relation to the same indicators, creating a sense of more equal and mutual accountability within the partnership.[191]

Independent evaluation of programs delivered in partnership is a further practice that has been identified by participants as serving a purpose for supporting and

[185] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[186] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[187] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[188] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 96.
[189] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 118.
[190] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 96; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 118.
[191] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.

maintaining relationships. One mainstream partner describes that this has enabled difficult issues to be addressed: *'If we evaluated ourselves we would be reluctant to raise quite controversial matters.'*[192] However, a number of ACCOs describe that where they do not have input into evaluation processes or where there is no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural perspective, evaluations will not be accurate or beneficial.[193] Issues also arise around different ways of providing feedback, with one ACCO describing that Aboriginal staff are reluctant to make negative comments which can lead to an unbalanced evaluation.[194]

Monitoring and evaluation of service delivery outcomes of partnership activities was common in the partnerships studied. However, it is notable that in almost all partnerships there was no significant or formalised evaluation of the partnership relationship itself or the contribution of that relationship to service outcomes. The only exceptions were in the case of broader government-led reviews of partnership-based service delivery models,[195] and one mainstream service provider who undertook a broader review of their work in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities.[196] In SNAICC's view, access to resources dedicated to partnership development, management and review processes has potential to shift the inadequate focus on review of partnership relationships. These possibilities, which are currently lacking, are described above in Section 5.2.

While partnerships included in this paper do not reflect significant partnership-focused evaluation practices, a recent case study described in the boxed text below provides an example of a participatory evaluation approach that was used to review a partnership between an ACCO and large international NGO. This approach reflects a number of effective partnership practices and principles identified in this paper and applied here within the context of evaluation. These include: a focus on building capacity for the ACCO; combined and collaborative staffing arrangements; adaptation of the process to include cultural perspectives and relevance to the community; and a focus on community development benefits of partnership.

PARTNERSHIP EVALUATION: A PROMISING APPROACH

Hunt provides a case study of an evaluation conducted in partnership between Oxfam Australia and Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation in Perth that includes promising practices for effective evaluation that incorporates the perspective and priorities of both partners.[197] Oxfam has provided support and funding to Yorgum

[192] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 118.
[193] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[194] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[195] See for example; KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services: Final Report.* Melbourne: KPMG and Victorian Government Department of Human Services; and National Evaluation Consortium. (2009). *National Evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger families and communities strategy 2004-2009*. Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
[196] See Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG.
[197] Hunt, J. (2010). *Partnerships for Indigenous Development: International Development NGOs, Aboriginal Organizations and Communities.* CAEPR Working Paper No. 71. Canberra:

for the provision of a counselling service for Aboriginal people affected by family violence and sexual abuse. The 2009 evaluation of the partnership and partnership activities included the following elements:[198]

- Use of a participatory evaluation approach, which was viewed as an opportunity to support Yorgum's capacity development by Oxfam.
- A mixed evaluation team included staff from Oxfam, Yorgum and an external consultant who mentored the participating Yorgum researcher.
- Participation of Yorgum in developing the terms of reference for the evaluation.
- Use of a values-based approach that focussed not only on service outcomes, but included Yorgum's story and growth with sensitivity to Aboriginal cultural processes.
- Adaption of standard evaluation questions of Oxfam, made relevant by Yorgum staff.
- A focus on capacity building and community development benefits of the partnership.

The evaluation process was new to all partners and was not without challenges. However, it was recognised as enabling valuable shared reflection on the partnership and the services provided by Yorgum that would feed into future strategic planning processes.[199]

Key Practices – Monitoring and Evaluation in Partnership	**Key Principles Reflected Through Practice**
1. Indicators of success are mutually agreed between partners and, where appropriate, jointly reported on.	Principles: 1, 2, 5 and 7
2. Where an ACCO reports to a partner who is also a funder, the ACCO participates in developing reporting processes which are relevant and not too onerous.	Principles: 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8
3. Partners provide support to ACCOs for evaluation capacity development and data collection processes.	Principles: 3, 6 and 7
4. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes.	Principles: 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7
5. Evaluation processes acknowledge and	Principles: 2 and 8

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU.

[198] Ibid, 15-19.

[199] Ibid, 20.

	incorporate Aboriginal cultural perspectives on evaluation including, for example, qualitative feedback and storytelling approaches.	

6. PROMISING PRACTICES: PARTNERSHIP OUTCOMES

This section highlights the key successful practices that partners identify contribute to significant partnership outcomes, including collective innovation and advocacy, cultural competency development, and capacity building. Partnership challenges and barriers to achieving these outcomes that indicate important areas of focus for support and improved practice are also identified.

6.1 Collective innovation and advocacy

Partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers can lead to opportunities for collective innovation and advocacy for service development to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Partnerships that include ACCOs provide forums for developing shared understanding about community needs and responses that are effective and culturally appropriate.[200] Shared understanding can lead to the development of joint strategies and new service models and approaches. Ultimately collective advocacy can be undertaken in partnership to secure government, community or sector support for new and innovative approaches.[201]

One mainstream partner describes that advocacy can be about providing support to existing strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and service leaders:

> *In terms of Aboriginal business, there are Aboriginal leaders there but they need the second people to come in so that everyone comes in behind them. And that's a role I think that all mainstreams could play. The problem is that a lot of mainstreams want to be the leaders. There are other things to lead on, not Aboriginal business.*[202]

An ACCO describes that this approach to innovation through partnership is vital to the design of effective services for Aboriginal families, which need to arise from 'a strategic push within the sector' and be driven by non-government service leaders who are connected to the 'day-to-day business' of children and family services.[203]

Partnerships in the case studies provide a number of significant examples of collective innovation:

- progressive implementation of Aboriginal cultural advice and support within

[200] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 6: AbSec; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[201] See especially: Case Study 6: AbSec; Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[202] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 159.
[203] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance, 146.

an integrated family services model by an ACCO with support of Alliance partners and government;[204]
- development of a proposal for an ACCO-led Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Team (Child FIRST) with support from Alliance partners;[205]
- development and piloting of an out-of-home care sector capacity building approach driven through a partnership between an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal peak body;[206] and
- adaptation of family violence referral and response systems to enhance culturally appropriate service provision.[207]

In SNAICC's view, service innovation through partnership presents a significant opportunity for government. Resourcing genuine partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers can create space for the development of local strategies and shared good practice. This provides opportunities for community-based 'bottom-up' policy development in line with the COAG *Service delivery principles for programs and services for Indigenous Australians* which require attention to 'engaging and empowering Indigenous people…and the broader Indigenous community in the design and delivery of services.'[208] Effective responses can be both identified and strongly advocated by multiple organisations that serve a large sector of the community and carry an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voice through the participation of ACCOs.

One participant highlighted the significantly positive role that state government has taken in providing space for and responding to family violence service model development in partnership between an ACCO and mainstream service provider:

> *They're very clear about working in a very fluid partnership, not a hierarchical structure where they're saying: we're the funder, you'll deliver. Instead, they're saying: here's a bit of space, let's see what we can do because this needs to be successful.*[209]

Issues based advocacy that connects 'on-the-ground' realities to higher-level policy debate has been identified as a practice that can be undertaken by large mainstream partners who have respectful relationships with smaller ACCOs who feel that they do not have a voice in broader strategic forums.[210] An ACCO describes the success of this approach:

> *It was good for us to have a conduit where we could get our intelligence of what was happening on the ground into policy debate…We saw issues getting*

[204] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance.
[205] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance.
[206] Case Study 6: AbSec.
[207] Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[208] Council of Australian Governments. (2008). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap).* Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia: Schedule D, D9 (b).
[209] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 157.
[210] See Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.

voiced…The combined work that we have done together, with the focussed lobbying and representation to government, has led to great reform. [211]

Key Practices – Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Key Principles Reflected Through Practice
1. Mainstream partners listen to and support ACCO perspectives on effective responses to community needs.	Principles: 2, 3 and 7
2. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7
3. Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream service providers to create space for service innovation.	Principles: 1, 3, 4, 6 and 8
4. Government listens and responds to service innovations developed and proposed by strong partnerships that include ACCO perspectives.	Principles: 2, 3, 7 and 8
5. Mainstream partners with significant broader influence represent 'on-the-ground' realities and the perspectives of ACCO partners in policy debate.	Principles: 2, 3 and 7

6.2 Cultural competency development for mainstream service providers

SNAICC has strongly advocated for the need for mainstream service providers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to develop cultural competency, recognising that 'our children and families must be provided with an appropriate and real choice of services, both Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and universal, and these services must be equipped to provide culturally proficient, quality programs that meet the holistic needs of clients.'[212]

[211] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 174.
[212] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 10.

Participants identify both the need for a commitment to developing cultural competency to enable partnership with ACCOs, and the significant opportunity that exists to develop cultural competency in partnership with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[213] Indeed, leading cultural competency frameworks recognise that effective partnerships are a vital component of culturally competent practice for mainstream child and family service providers.[214] As VACCA describes, 'if a community service organisation has worked to a point where they believe they can be self-sufficient in their cultural competency, they have missed the point.'[215]

6.2.1 Working within a cultural competency framework

The boxed text is extracted from the SNAICC paper *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services* (2011).[216] In this extract SNAICC has defined and described an understanding of working within a cultural competency framework based on the literature.

WHAT IS A CULTURAL COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

> *Culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.*[217]

Similar to UNESCO's definition of culture, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency adopts a view of culture that is holistic and inseparable from an individual's identity, behaviour, thoughts and way of life. This holistic approach requires any organisation or individual seeking to communicate and work with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to obtain a level of understanding of their cultures. The comprehensive nature of cultural competency may often require a considerable shift for an organisation's practice if it is to be more than a 'tokenistic effort'.[218]

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[213] See all case studies.

[214] See for example: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services.* Melbourne: VACCA, 140.

[215] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 34.

[216] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services.* Melbourne: SNAICC, 11-13.

[217] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (1982). *Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies*. World Conference on Cultural Policies. Mexico City.

218 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 23

Tong and Cross describe cultural competency as 'a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals to work effectively in a cross-cultural situation.' [219] Developed from earlier concepts such as 'cultural safety', 'cultural awareness', 'cultural respect' and 'cultural security',[220] cultural competency represents an ongoing process, or scale of attitudes, behaviours and policies that range from what is described as culturally destructive through to culturally proficient.[221] As a framework, Grote[222] observes that it is flexible and transferable across sectors.

Cultural competency is not a finite checklist process, rather it is 'a constant, ongoing process for non-Indigenous organisations and staff'.[223] The literature also recognises that moving towards 'cultural proficiency' requires the presence of enabling factors, including dedicated resources, a strong policy environment and committed organisational support.[224]

The achievement of culturally competent practice involves significant organisational commitment to improved outcomes for our children and families.[225] It means an investment of resources, a commitment from management and staff, and an honest desire to move towards cultural proficiency. VACCA's spectrum recognises that a

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219 Tong C. and Cross T. (1991). *Cross Cultural Partnerships for Child Abuse Prevention with Native American Communities*. Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute. Portland, Oregon, 12

[220] Grote, E. (2008). *Principles and Practices of Cultural Competency: A Review of the Literature*. Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), 12; and Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 17.

[221] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 23. See also: the Mentorship Circles Project. (2011). *Mentorship Circles Project Workshop, workshop notes.* Received from Gundoo Aboriginal Corporation, which describes cultural competence as a developmental process of improving relations, ranging from a point of 'disconnect and unknowing', which can be built upon by consultation through several stages to a point of 'cultural integrity', where relationships are characterised by sophistication, respect, integrity and dignity.

[222] Grote, E. (2008). Principles and Practices of Cultural Competency: A Review of the Literature. Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), 5.

[223] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 86.

[224] National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council. (2009). *Solid work you mob are doing: Case Studies in Indigenous Dispute Resolution & Conflict Management in Australia*. Federal Court of Australia's Indigenous Dispute Resolution & Conflict Management Case Study Project (AIDR).

[225] Grote, E. (2008). Principles and Practices of Cultural Competency: A Review of the Literature. Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), 46.

[226] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services*. Melbourne: VACCA, 23.

movement towards cultural proficiency, which often follows symbolic change, is a process 'built over time, not overnight'.[226]

In this paper the term 'cultural awareness' is also used. Cultural awareness is an aspect of and precursor to cultural competency. It refers to the development of knowledge about another culture and the understanding 'that cultural differences may necessitate a different approach to people of that other culture.'[227]

6.2.2 What does it mean to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

ACCOs believe that developing cultural competency for working in partnership to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families begins with acknowledging that one needs to work *differently* to provide appropriate support. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service leaders who participated in the case studies describe this clearly in relation to different service contexts:

> Family violence referral and support services:
> *Family violence in Aboriginal communities can be quite overt, because we're more likely to conduct ourselves in a public situation…Whereas family violence in a western concept is what happens behind closed doors and fences, and is very much managed in a different way. It's not because it's culturally acceptable, it's because of how legislatively and politically our communities have been set up … the whole manifestation of family violence comes from a different space, but violence is violence. It's really about thinking about how we deliver it in the context of Aboriginal strength and resilience, to meet the needs of families and children.*[228]

> Child protection and welfare services:
> *You do need to understand the significance of working for a welfare organisation, how that will impact for Aboriginal people. You do need to understand that mainstream organisations have come from particular churches and you need to understand that a number of the people you're dealing with were brought up in their institutions; that will have an impact.*[229]

> Early childhood education and care:
> *We promote ourselves as Indigenous education and that's why we always reserve the right to adapt programmes for that purpose … It has to go both ways. We've got to accept that all children will be mainstreamed, it's a mainstream life and we need to give these tools to these children so that they can go into a non-Indigenous context and take on the world, but they still keep*

[227] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework.* Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 25.
[228] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 161.
[229] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.

their culture inside.[230]

You can't explain to people who have only worked mainstream what it's like to work in an Aboriginal setting, so a lot of challenges have been trying to get the staff to accept that it is different and it's okay to work differently. There are a lot of community factors that play a part…Playgroup is a classic; we couldn't just start up one playgroup, we had to start up with two playgroups because of the mob matching. It's hard to get community to trust playgroup, particularly with non-Indigenous workers.[231]

The commitment to working differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families requires at its base, recognition of and value for the cultural knowledge and skills of ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that are crucial for effective service provisions for children and families.[232]

6.2.3 Cultural awareness and cultural competency training

Many participants highlight that a level of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture is necessary to enable partnership work.[233] Mainstream partners recognise the need for an ongoing commitment to developing knowledge and learning from ACCOs and communities.[234] As one ACCO describes of a mainstream partner:

She had enormous knowledge about Aboriginal history and suffering and she was willing to learn. She cared. It hurt her. The issues and all the money from NGOs going in with little change. This was the premise of her work. That approach governed the partnership.[235]

In terms of partnership, it is clear that ACCOs have a key role to play in directing, guiding or conducting cultural awareness training and learning experiences for mainstream partners.[236] This reflects a recognition that cultural awareness must be developed locally, having regard to the many and distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that exist throughout Australia.[237] A willingness to learn about culture from an ACCO partner is a recognised way of demonstrating respect

[230] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 127-128.
[231] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97-98.
[232] See Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*. Melbourne: SNAICC, 86-87.
[233] Described in: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165-166; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97.
[234] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97.
[235] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165.
[236] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka, Case Study 5: Dalaigur; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[237] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.* Melbourne: SNAICC, 9-10.

for their cultural knowledge and skills.[238] This also shows respect for the role of the ACCO in the community and enables them to guide relationships with the broader community for cultural learning:

> *So it's about saying to Aboriginal people: … You are seen as an expert in your culture, you've got that knowledge around risk, and you've got that right to be talking up about what you think should happen.*[239]

> *One of the critical things is that in working with [the ACCO] we learn from them. We learn from not just [the ACCO] but the Aboriginal community. They actually influence the way that we work.*[240]

Significant cultural learning occurs in less formal ways through staff interactions and mutual mentoring roles between organisations. Shared staffing arrangements, staff secondments and staff co-location have been successful practices for enabling informal cultural learning and improving the knowledge of mainstream service staff required for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.[241] An ACCO explains the value of a shared staff member for enhancing culturally appropriate services of their mainstream partner:

> *[We] could have her working for [us] full-time, but the benefits to the community from that shared learning are too great. She can help the workers within [the mainstream service] understand why a family might be behaving the way they are because she knows them from over here. There's that education and cross-education that's too invaluable to lose.*[242]

Another ACCO explains their significant work to support a mainstream partner that was new in the community:

> *This was an important role that [we] played in the beginning: skilling up [the mainstream organisation] about the area and the community and helping them to manage expectations and maintain morale.*[243]

In one case an ACCO identifies resistance from staff of a government service provider to cultural competency training because of the time it requires them to take out from a busy workload.[244] The ACCO highlights the importance of recognising that a commitment to cultural understanding, and a small amount of work up front can make working with Aboriginal families 'easier and smoother.'[245] One successful strategy used by the ACCO to address resistance to cultural training

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[238] See for example: Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165; Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 162.
[239] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[240] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 97.
[241] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[242] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 98.
[243] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 167.
[244] See for example: Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[245] See for example: Ibid.

has been for government staff who value and benefit from cultural understanding in their work to share their positive experiences with other staff.[246]

6.2.4 Cultural advice

The provision of cultural advice in relation to particular cases is seen as an important way that ACCOs can work in partnership with mainstream service provider staff to improve culturally appropriate service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. A number of existing or proposed cultural advice roles that partnerships within the case studies in this paper have highlighted as having some success include:

- Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services providing cultural advice at key decision-making points in child protection cases.[247]
- An Aboriginal Liaison Worker to support mainstream organisations providing services to Aboriginal families as part of a broader integrated child and family service alliance.[248]
- A proposed cultural advice role to support mainstream organisations providing family violence support to Aboriginal families.[249]

SNAICC believes that ACCOs should have a leading role in the provision of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, but cultural advice roles are appropriate where families choose to work with mainstream service providers or as a measure to address a lack of capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service sector in the short-term.

6.2.5 Employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

Employment of and appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff by mainstream partners is identified by participants as key to effective partnership relationships.[250] This practice is recognised as reflecting respect for and commitment to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.[251] In SNAICC's view this approach demonstrates a commitment to local employment, building local workforce capacity, and valuing local knowledge and skills. One ACCO explains how a relationship improved when their partner employed a local Program Coordinator:

> *When Eddie took over things changed. He is from this country and is a black fella. That gave them the strength for people to say this mob are serious and they are going to stay.*[252]

[246] Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka.
[247] Ibid; and Case Study 6: AbSec.
[248] Case Study 7: VACCA/HMIFS Alliance
[249] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[250] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 173-174.
[251] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 173-174.
[252] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115.

Local employment also creates internal opportunities for cultural learning. In particular, when Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff are employed in leadership positions, this is identified as assisting in incorporating a focus on cultural competency and partnerships with ACCOs into mainstream organisational practice.[253] However, the employment of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff members by mainstream service providers that do not have a broader commitment to cultural competency is likely to lead to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff feeling isolated and unsupported.[254] Developing cultural competence is recognised as 'the most effective way a non-Indigenous organisation can attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.'[255]

One ACCO describes strongly the approach to, and benefits of, their partner's focus on local Aboriginal employment:

> *Most of [their] staff is local staff and [they have] always had a strong philosophy of working with local people … With local staff, you have a life long relationship between [their people] and our staff: that is forever stuff.*[256]

6.2.6 Utilising cultural competency framework documents

A number of cultural competency framework documents exist to guide mainstream service providers in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These frameworks can play an important role in guiding and informing the development of organisational cultural competency. Such cultural competency frameworks are distinct from, but also supported by, organisation-specific frameworks that support the development of cultural competency. Organisation-specific frameworks span an array of initiatives implemented by services through their work and include, for example, a statement of organisational values or principles of operation developed by an organisation to direct the development of its partnerships with ACCOs. Broader cultural competency framework documents can assist services to build on their own initiatives or organisational frameworks to deepen their understanding of the different facets of cultural competency. These can assist to ensure that their processes, frameworks, systems and activities are designed to reflect the multi-faceted approach necessary for moving towards cultural proficiency[257] within an organisation.

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[253] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 121.

[254] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.* Melbourne: SNAICC, 100.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 1174.

[257] Note that cultural proficiency is the highest level of attainment within the cultural competency continuum: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services.* Melbourne: VACCA, 23.

Leading cultural competency framework documents identified by SNAICC include:

- The **VACCA Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework** developed for the Victorian Department of Human Services. This framework is incorporated within agency registration standards for community service organisations providing child and family services and out-of-home care services in Victoria. This framework reflects an acknowledgement by the Victorian Government 'that recognition of Aboriginal self-determination and the provision of culturally competent services are fundamental to improved outcomes.'[258]
- The **SNAICC Working and Walking Together** resource which is designed to support family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and communities.[259]
- The **VACCA Building Respectful Partnerships** resource which was developed in a partnership between VACCA, Berry Street and MacKillop Family Services. This resource is designed as a practice guide 'to describe culturally competent and respectful practice across an organisation,'[260] with the aim to 'improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and families and strengthen partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations.'[261]

All of these framework documents highlight the importance of partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in the development of cultural competency.

No participants in the case studies provided detailed information on the use of specific cultural competency framework documents. However, organisations in Victoria did identify the *VACCA Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* as informing practice in working with Aboriginal children and families and organisations. Participants viewed frameworks as tools that contributed to a broader organisational focus on cultural competency development. One mainstream participant was involved in the development of the *VACCA Building Respectful Partnerships* resource and described this as an important context to their relationships with ACCOs.

Some mainstream service providers participating in the case studies indicate that they have developed and actively implement a Reconciliation Action Plan which describes and informs the commitment of the organisation to engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.[262] Organisations have also developed, or been engaged in processes

[258] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework.* Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services, 7.
[259] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations*. Melbourne: SNAICC.
[260] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2010). *Building Respectful Partnerships: The commitment to Aboriginal cultural competence in child and family services.* Melbourne: VACCA, 1.
[261] Ibid.
[262] See for example: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; and Case

to develop, other documents which describe their approach to building cultural competency and working in culturally competent ways.[263]

6.2.7 Commitment to self-determination

Mainstream organisations that participated in the case studies demonstrate an ability to identify and name their role as service providers in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in relation to the role of ACCOs. This includes recognising the strengths of ACCOs, and their important role in leading responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs:

> *[they] should be the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business, but we use the words 'walk alongside' and we choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do.*[264]

This reflects an approach of mainstream partners that is underpinned by a commitment to self-determination.[265] The *VACCA Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* highlights that 'in order to avoid partnerships that are either paternalistic or unintentionally disempower Aboriginal communities and services, a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination must inform the engagement between community service organisations and ACCOs.'[266] It is important to note that a commitment to self-determination does not equate to leaving ACCOs to address community needs on their own. It requires of mainstream service providers to give support through genuine partnerships, recognising the significant community needs and capacity gaps that exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.[267]

SNAICC suggests that 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. These practices are addressed in the focus on capacity building in Section 6.3 below. They include, significantly, a focus on supported transfer of resources and responsibility to ACCOs for the delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families as described in Section 6.34 below.

Study 4: WELA/StC.

[263] See for example: Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH, 108-109; and Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 128.

[264] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.

[265] Expressed clearly in: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 91, 98; Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 119; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 160.

[266] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework.* Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services.

[267] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010b). *Working and Walking Together: Supporting family relationship services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.* Melbourne: SNAICC, 83.

6.2.8 Service access for children and families

Prior SNAICC research addresses the evidence base that strongly links cultural competency to increasing access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[268] The case studies do not reveal service access and delivery outcomes of the partnerships in a detailed way. This is, in part, because of the lack of evaluation that has been undertaken to link partnership relationships to outcomes as described in Section 5.3 above, and because the process does not include review of evaluation data in its scope. However, some participants provide valuable reflections on how the development of cultural competency through partnership work promotes access and positive service outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Participants confirm that increases in cultural appropriateness of services and consequent improvements in community perception of services are increasing engagement with services that are delivered in partnership:

> *Families are comfortable using the kindergarten because they wouldn't know that it is owned and operated by [the mainstream service provider], what they see is the two organisations working together…now we've got nearly 100 per cent attendance…We now have a waiting list.*[269]

Another participant explains that partnership work with a mainstream early intervention disability support service has made parents more willing to access the service, more aware of their children's support needs and more accepting of the fact that their children have disabilities and require support.[270] The combination of the accessibility of the ACCO and the disability focus of the mainstream service provider was seen as critical to this outcome.

A mainstream partner engaged in family violence support work describes that as a result of partnership with an ACCO:

> *There are far more women working with Aboriginal controlled organisations and far more women who are working in mainstream who have a more culturally competent service.*[271]

Cultural competency developed through partnership has also been recognised as increasing the capacity and legitimacy of mainstream service providers to implement additional and necessary service programs within Aboriginal and Torres

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[268] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011a). *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*. Melbourne: SNAICC; and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010a). *Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services.* Melbourne: SNAICC.
[269] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 100-101.
[270] Case Study 5: Dalaigur.
[271] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 162.

Strait Islander communities.[272]

Key Practices – Developing Cultural Competency in Partnership	**Key Principles Reflected Through Practice**
1. Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners.	Principles: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8
2. Mainstream organisations recognise that cultural differences require them to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.	Principles: 2, 3, 7 and 8
3. Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements provide opportunities for developing cultural understanding through informal staff interaction and specific learning of shared staff members.	Principles: 1, 2, 6, 7 and 8
4. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8
5. Mainstream partners employ and support local Aboriginal staff as a component of a broader commitment to cultural competency.	Principles: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7
6. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (where families choose to work with mainstream or given short term lack of capacity in the ACCO service sector).	Principles: 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8
7. Mainstream organisations utilise and develop framework documents to describe and inform their approach to developing cultural competency, including Reconciliation Action Plans. This process includes input and support from ACCO partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait	Principles: 2, 6, 7 and 8

[272] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.

Islander communities. 8. Mainstream organisations have a commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs.	Principles: 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8

Note: these are practices that can support cultural competence development through partnership relationships and work. This is by no means a comprehensive list of what is required for culturally competent organisational practice.[273]

6.3 Capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations

This section focuses on practices that support the development of governance and service capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders community-controlled organisations. Capacity building is strongly recognised throughout the partnerships included in the case studies as enabling an enhanced role and voice for ACCOs and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is important to note that capacity benefits flow in both directions in the partnerships. Significant capacity benefits for mainstream service providers have accrued in areas including cultural competency for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for developing effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These capacity benefits are described separately in the focus on cultural competency in section 6.2 above.

While capacity challenges for ACCOs may be related to deficiencies in good governance and organisational development, mainstream participants identify that capacity challenges for their ACCO partners are often more significantly related to the extent of community need and the large service delivery demands placed upon those organisations. [274] A mainstream service provider notes with concern:

> *I don't know that there's a lot of conversation and acknowledgement around the [Aboriginal] organisation's capacity to do what [government] think needs to be done. They keep throwing resources, but then you've got people standing there trying to juggle all this.*[275]

One participant provides the useful explanation that in a respectful partnership the focus is on developing shared capacity to meet community needs and take advantage of available funding opportunities:

[273] See for example the cultural competency frameworks detailed in this section.
[274] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 2: GEGAC/GLCH; and Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[275] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.

Neither agency would want to say no to any of the resources on offer from government and if [we] work together [we] have the opportunity to strengthen the delivery of those resources in a way that will have better outcomes for the communities.[276]

6.3.1 Training, mentoring and workforce development

Most mainstream partners that participated had a significant staff skill and qualification base as well as resources to access further training. They identified a significant role in enabling and providing training opportunities for ACCO partners. There were also opportunities to undertake staff mentoring and supervision roles. In SNAICC's view the active process of identifying these opportunities is important to establishing a two-way learning relationship and ensuring that both parties benefit, especially where an ACCO is sharing cultural knowledge and skills, and assisting with community connections.

Participants recognise that capacity building through staff development should be focussed on the needs of ACCOs and the strengths of mainstream partners.[277] An ACCO explains how a mainstream partner was able to share skills and respond to training needs:

Lisa, who is a highly skilled practitioner in this area of social work for kids and families, did counselling training and brief intervention training for our staff. This, during a period in which we were drastically underfunded … was really useful.[278]

In a respectful relationship mainstream partners can make recommendations in relation to training needs of ACCOs that help to make clear the support they can offer.[279] Training support has also involved mainstream partners providing opportunities for ACCO staff to undertake training jointly with mainstream staff, and partners delivering internal staff training jointly.[280] These practices have additional benefits for staff interaction and relationship building.

Staff mentoring roles are identified as an important way to share skills, often through informal arrangements.[281] This has included being opportunistic about accessing and sharing the specific skills of the staff involved in the partnership.[282] One ACCO partner explains that the Program Coordinator in their partner organisation has strong skills in financial management and accounting and her

[276] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 100.
[277] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116, 120; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.
[278] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 172.
[279] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 120.
[280] See for example: joint training provision in Case Study 3: VACCA Lakidjeka; training provision and access to training proposed in Case Study 6: AbSec, 142; invitations to participate in training in Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 96.
[281] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115, 116, 120-121; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 171.
[282] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 115, 116; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 172.

willingness to share these skills has contributed to capacity building and the strength of the relationship.[283] Where this works well, staff of mainstream partners and ACCOs work alongside each other in mutual mentoring roles exchanging knowledge and skills that contribute to the response to community needs.[284] One approach used to building staff mentoring and support into a partnership has been an arrangement where staff supervision is provided by a mainstream service provider to staff within an ACCO partner.[285]

One ACCO participant explains that their approach to partnerships is strongly guided by a commitment to developing the skills of their staff to provide the best possible services to children and families.[286] This ACCO seeks partnerships that provide opportunities to address specific skill needs. They describe that this is about, 'empowering staff to go up a level and it builds their self esteem,' and recognising that, 'just because they don't have the certificates doesn't mean that they don't have the potential.'[287] A partner providing training for staff of the same ACCO recognises the existing strengths of staff and community members and explains that there are opportunities to build staff capacity in the short-term:

> *We can give them enough specialised learning and understanding and they're really effective with the children, then in time they can go on and do their study as their families get older, but don't miss out on their energy, insights and knowledge of children just because they don't have the qualifications.*[288]

The ACCO explains that this approach has both enhanced the individual capacity of staff and responded to their expressed desire to be accepted in mainstream contexts and not to be looked down on because they worked for an ACCO. They explain that staff 'wanted to be seen as equals' and that through partnership training opportunities they have achieved this goal.[289]

Building capacity for individual staff members of ACCOs is recognised as empowering community members and promoting community leadership. One ACCO describes strongly:

> *We also have a couple of generations of shame in front of people … If we want to break that culture and have these people become role models for the children and community leaders we need to start giving them responsibility…not do it for them.*[290]

Within this partnership the empowerment of community members has been a great success story, *'they are part of the success … their personal growth as community*

[283] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 116.
[284] See for example: Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[285] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 156.
[286] Case Study 5: Dalaigur.
[287] Case Study 5: Dalaigur, 132.
[288] Ibid.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 119.

women. The building of their skills and confidence is enormous.'[291] Another ACCO describes that the up-skilling of staff through partnership and staff cross-over between the two organisations has made a significant contribution to the NGO sector becoming *'more professional and better resourced'* in their region.[292]

6.3.2 Governance systems development

It is recognised that large and well-developed organisations can provide support for governance systems development, particularly for new and fledgling ACCOs.[293] One mainstream partner describes that their role is *'to facilitate and support Aboriginal community and organisational governance structures, rather than taking on a governance role.'*[294] Especially for well-developed ACCOs, governance support may not be needed or wanted in some situations.[295] It is important for mainstream partners to recognise that governance for an ACCO will be different to mainstream governance and there should not be an approach of seeking to align governance systems.[296]

Types of governance support that have been identified as valuable or necessary for ACCO partners include:

- Working alongside the organisation to support the development of autonomous governance structure that enabled independent incorporation.[297]
- Taking an auspice role while providing support for capacity development to meet accreditation requirements.[298]
- Support for developing data collection and recording systems to assist in meeting evaluation and reporting needs and requirements.[299]
- Support for the development of specific organisational policies and procedures.[300]
- Providing staff members on secondment to fill short-term capacity gaps, for example, in facilitation and administration.[301]

A mainstream partner highlights the importance of governance support provided to an ACCO partner, describing that it has contributed to strengthening their management committee who are all local Aboriginal community members.[302]

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[291] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 123.
[292] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 173.
[293] See especially: Case Study 4: WELA/StC; Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC; and Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG.
[294] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 100.
[295] See for example: Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 165.
[296] This reflects the fundamental understanding that 'Aboriginal organisations are different', which is described in Section 3 above.
[297] Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[298] Proposed in Case Study 6: AbSec.
[299] Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[300] Case Study 4: WELA/StC.
[301] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.
[302] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 120.

6.3.3 Support for obtaining sustainable funding and resources

Support for obtaining funding is important to capacity development, and important to long-term sustainability of partnership work, especially where one partner is a funder who cannot sustain and increase funding in line with the organisational growth of an ACCO.[303]

ACCOs identify key ways in which mainstream partners have been able to support them in obtaining funding and developing more diverse and sustainable funding sources. It is important to note that these are specific supports for obtaining funding while other governance capacity development support can help to position ACCOs to apply for and attract funding:[304]

- Linking ACCOs with funding bodies and advocating on their behalf with funders.
- Providing information to ACCOs about funding opportunities.
- Providing short-term and gap funding to assist while sustainable funding is sourced.
- Providing support for development and feedback on funding submissions.
- Developing joint funding submissions for the delivery of services in partnership.[305]
- Promoting the work of the ACCO in different forums including on their website.

6.3.4 Transfer and handover models

Successful and respectful partnerships regularly have a strong focus on a transfer of resources, leadership and responsibility for service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to ACCOs.[306] The idea that resources and responsibility should be transferred when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are 'ready' for this comes through strongly from many participants. In SNAICC's view this reflects a true commitment to self-determination that goes beyond simply shifting resources and placing responsibility on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with insufficient capacity to manage them. Partnerships in the case studies commonly featured a commitment to building Aboriginal service capacity for the long-term, while working together to address immediate needs and meet expectations.

Statements of commitment to supported transfer of resources and responsibility to ACCOs include:

[303] See Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 121.
[304] See especially Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[305] See Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street.
[306] See especially: Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG; Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Studies 6–9.

> *[They] should be the lead and the dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business … the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole programme area moves to [them] when they're ready for that.*[307]

> *Ideally we wouldn't be here in 20 or 50 years, so it is important for us to build capacity locally.*[308]

> *I think there are a lot of resources in the sector that could and should go to Aboriginal organisations…[and this should happen] when [they] say it should; when they believe they have the capacity and readiness to take resources on.*[309]

A concern was raised by an ACCO about assumptions being made that ACCOs want to take on programs, without adequate discussion or capacity building support.[310] This highlights the need for the transfer of resources or services to happen in the context of genuine and supportive partnerships:

> *We don't know…whether we will have the capacity or the desire to manage 20 additional staff and a client list in the 1000s. So a practical partnership discussion where are willing participants in working towards a mutually beneficial outcome needs to occur.*[311]

One partnership describes a positive process where they are working together to develop a new service for children and families and are planning for the capacity building work required to transfer the service to be operated by the ACCO:

> *The strategy includes a three-year plan for [the mainstream agency] to work alongside [the ACCO] in the development and delivery of the service while supporting capacity to transition the service to operation by [the ACCO] in that timeframe.*[312]

An important approach identified in some partnerships has been the flexible 'in-out' movement of partners in response to the needs of the organisation and the community.[313] This is successful where mainstream partners walk alongside ACCOs, providing support as needed but not imposing themselves when it is not needed. There is an 'ebb and flow' in terms of partnership activity, but at the same time a continuing commitment to the partnership relationship:

> *In the future there will be times when we need them more and when we don't need them so much. The relationship is flexible enough to support that and to evolve with that.*[314]

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[307] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.
[308] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 112.
[309] Case Study 8: VACCA/Berry Street, 160.
[310] Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC, 177.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Case Study 1: GEGAC/UCG, 99.
[313] See especially Case Study 4: WELA/StC; and Case Study 9: Larrakia/StC.
[314] Case Study 4: WELA/StC, 114.

Key Practices – Building Capacity	Key Principles Reflected Through Practice
1. Mainstream partners work with ACCOs to identify opportunities for staff training, mentoring and skills development in key areas of need ACCOs identify.	Principles: 2, 3 and 7
2. Mainstream partners make recommendations and offers to ACCO partners in relation to training needs that make clear what they can provide.	Principles: 3 and 6
3. Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs.	Principles: 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6
4. Mainstream partners provide support for governance system development that promotes strong and autonomous governance structures that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership.	Principles: 2, 3, 4 and 7
5. Mainstream partner provides supports for obtaining sustainable funding that include: providing information, facilitating links; advocacy and promotion; gap funding; joint submissions; and support for developing submissions.	Principles: 1, 3 and 4
6. Mainstream partners support transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	Principles: 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8
7. Government and NGO peak bodies identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for ACCO child and family service delivery, and strategically address capacity gaps by supporting and enabling partnerships.	Principles: 2, 3, 4 and 7

7. A PROMISING MODEL FOR PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat, New South Wales (AbSec) and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) have commenced a process for developing new Aboriginal community controlled Out-of Home Care (OOHC) services through a partnership-based capacity building model. This project is taking place in the context of the transfer of OOHC service provision to the NGO sector in New South Wales and is supported by the NSW Department of Families and Communities (FaCS).

The AbSec/ACWA project reflects the need to develop capacity in the Aboriginal community-controlled service sector in line with the transfer plan which includes the goal that 'ultimately, all Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC will be cared for by Aboriginal carers, and supported by Aboriginal caseworkers employed by local Aboriginal managed agencies.'[315] The plan recognises that to achieve this goal, capacity of ACCOs in the sector will have to increase about eightfold and, in addition to the three to four initial capacity building sites, a further seven new Aboriginal agencies need to be developed.[316] The focus on capacity building seeks to ensure that the transfer of services is not simply a transfer of responsibility, but rather supports new ways of work that are effective, culturally appropriate and adequately resourced. The approach emerged from a shared commitment to implement the approach suggested by the *SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy*.[317]

The boxed case study below provides an overview of key elements of the partnership-based approach to capacity building. For a more detailed description of the project and its context, refer to *Case Study 6* in Appendix A.

CASE STUDY: BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN MAINSTREAM SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The AbSec/ACWA Capacity Building Project is seeking to develop new Aboriginal OOHC agencies through partnerships between existing large and effective non-Aboriginal OOHC providers and Aboriginal communities. The project is in initial stages of partnership negotiation and development and is being undertaken in three to four locations, with agreement to extend the capacity building activities to address the capacity gap for Aboriginal agencies statewide. The project proposes

[315] The Ministerial Advisory Group on Transition of Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) Service Provision in NSW to the Non-Government Sector. (2011). *OOHC Transition Plan: Stage 1 – The 'Who' and the 'When'*, Sydney: NSW Department of Family and Community Services. Retrieved on 10 January, 2012 from http://www.absec.org.au/data/files/6b/00/00/00/OOHC%20Transition%20Plan%20Stage%201.doc

[316] Ibid.

[317] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2008). *SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy*. Melbourne: SNAICC.

auspicing arrangements through which mainstream service providers will support the growth, development and accreditation of new Aboriginal agencies that will transition to autonomous governance within an agreed timeframe.

Aspects of the approach that show promise for building respectful and effective partnerships include:

- AbSec as both an Aboriginal-controlled organisation and the peak body for Aboriginal OOHC providers in NSW is taking a leading role and ensuring the approach reflects both good practice in service provision for Aboriginal children and families and the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples.
- There is a funded role for brokering partnerships and facilitating initial partnership development that sits with the AbSec Capacity Building Manager. This role enhances the negotiating position of Aboriginal communities and new Aboriginal service providers.
- Agreements are being established from the start which clearly identify partnership goals and include a commitment from mainstream organisations to a supported transition to autonomous governance for the new Aboriginal agency.
- The capacity building approach is being tailored to the needs of local communities, taking account of needs, existing service provision and the challenges in rural and remote locations.
- The project is being implemented by AbSec and ACWA in partnership, with significant support from FaCS and reflects a commitment to respectful and effective partnership at all levels.

The approach seeks to ensure that relationships are underpinned by principles of effective and respectful partnership with Aboriginal organisations. AbSec is giving significant attention to identifying the baseline commitment this requires from mainstream organisations. Elements of this commitment identified by AbSec include:[318]

- Commitment to recruitment, employment and support of Aboriginal carers.
- Understanding of and commitment to Aboriginal Child Placement Principles.
- Demonstrated cultural proficiency and commitment to cultural support for Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- Plans to support the auspiced service to achieve accreditation, autonomous governance and organisational capacity.
- Commitment that is motivated by a desire to grow the Aboriginal service sector and improve outcomes for Aboriginal families rather than specific financial and growth benefits for the mainstream agency.

AbSec and ACWA identify that facilitating effective partnerships between mainstream organisations and Aboriginal communities and agencies will require:

- Ongoing communication with Aboriginal communities and agencies from

[318] Note: These principles reflect the position of Absec. Probity issues relating to auspice organisations for the capacity building project are currently being negotiated with FaCS.

AbSec to ensure the flow of information to and from them is open and transparent.
- Communication and leadership from ACWA and FaCS with mainstream services to encourage their engagement and participation.
- Commitment from FaCS to develop referral and communication strategies that ensure the engagement of local and regional level FaCS staff.
- Appropriate consultation of Aboriginal communities at all stages of the project.
- Assessment of the suitability of individual mainstream agencies to participate in a meaningful way.

Though the project is only in early stages of development, some specific types of capacity building support that could be provided by auspice organisations that AbSec have identified include:

- Sharing infrastructure through initial co-location to reduce start-up costs for new agencies.
- Assisting with financial management.
- Providing supervision for OOHC workers.
- Making training opportunities within the auspice organisation available to workers of the new agency initially and on an ongoing basis.
- Developing local workforce capacity by supporting the employment and training of Aboriginal staff.
- Providing new agencies with opportunities to experience, observe and learn from current good practice.

It is important to note that while this approach has significant potential for building the Aboriginal service sector through partnerships, it is still in the development phase and there are substantial challenges to be addressed. While there is currently funding to support facilitation of partnerships, investment to support the actual ongoing capacity building work is needed.

SNAICC believes that this model shows significant promise in its commitment to the development of respectful partnership relationships and sector wide capacity building. The approach should be monitored and considered for national and cross-sector implementation.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Concluding analysis

The case studies reviewed through this research reveal successful practices for the development and management of partnerships for optimal delivery of support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The case studies highlight that partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and mainstream service providers can have multiple capacity development outcomes for both partners. These include: strengthened cultural competence of mainstream services for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; enhanced capacity of both partners to build relationships across different cultures; increased leadership capacity and role of ACCOs; and enhanced ability of ACCOs to respond to community need. The strengthened role and capacity of ACCOs that has developed through partnerships has contributed to broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community capacity by promoting: independent, community-based governance; local workforce development; and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. The perspectives and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and communities have been represented more strongly in policy reform and service development through the shared understanding and support of mainstream partners. This has enabled the development of innovative practice to enhance outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Analysis of these case studies also highlights, however, that fundamental to achieving these outcomes is adherence by both partners to the eight interrelated and interdependent principles detailed in section 3. These principles are:

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

Notably, in almost all case studies, partnerships were made possible by a strong and **long-term commitment** of time and resources to **relationship building** and **developing trust**. This occurred despite, but was often limited by, a lack of available resources to dedicate to the task. This dearth of resources was further reflected in the absence of partnership-focussed evaluation processes and the tendency for partnership planning processes to be informal and opportunistic, rather than having a long-term strategic focus. These examples indicated a strong need for government and service providers to place greater **value on the processes** which are required for effective partnership development and management, including through enabling resources and contracts which allow for these processes to take place.

A focus on process elements was enabled by support for partnership development through service integration and partnership facilitation models. These supported successful partnerships particularly where partnership facilitators demonstrated a significant level of cultural competence and actively engaged and supported ACCO interests. While these models show great promise for successful partnership development and management, the partnership principles highlight that realisation of this potential requires their further development to properly incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

The overriding characteristic of successful relationships that emerged through the case studies was demonstration of **respect** by mainstream service providers for their ACCO partners, their cultural knowledge and skills, and their important role within the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. This respect was demonstrated in many forms including: providing ACCOs with the space to lead on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business; seeking advice and support from ACCO partners; advocating in support of ACCOs and their perspectives; and conducting meetings at offices of ACCOs. A clear **commitment to self-determination** was one of the most significant indicators of this respect, including a commitment to the supported transfer of resources, services and leadership to ACCOs within partnerships. Supporting ACCOs to build capacity so that they can manage resources and lead effectively reflects an approach that is based on **shared responsibility** to address community needs and **improve long-term wellbeing outcomes** for children and families. Partnerships within this study consistently connected these outcomes to service design, development and delivery based upon local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs and aspirations. Partners recognised the importance of these factors to the service outcomes they achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They identified that there were limitations to community-based partnership planning as a result of short-term and activity-based government funding. The case studies indicate that more flexible and longer term funding commitments would support partnerships to pursue creative and long-term responses to community needs that would improve outcomes.

Practices which were successful in **addressing unequal power** in partnership relationships, more broadly in the position of ACCOs in the sector, and the ongoing exclusion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face, were strongly linked with those that promoted **mutual accountability**. This included: formalising

agreements to clarify and reinforce mutual accountability and partnership commitments; support for governance systems development of ACCOs that promotes and enables autonomous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership; transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision; employment of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; various strategies to strengthen cultural competence of the mainstream partner and its staff; and collective development of evaluation and review processes that reflect ACCO perspectives.

These practices build on the mainstream partners' respect for ACCOs as equal partners and **redress structures** which have limited ACCO capacity, participation and influence over systems of service delivery and funding. These practices also challenge traditional patronising approaches of mainstream services to **relationships with ACCOs and communities, and seek to redress discriminatory outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that are based on generational trauma from the imposition of discriminatory laws, policies and practices. Above all, this principle reflects the understanding that structural factors have operated to exclude, suppress and impoverish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples since colonisation. This understanding then also obligates mainstream partners to unearth and challenge persistent direct and indirect discrimination in conventional practice, support structures that reflect both partners' goals and needs, and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

Related to this principle is an openness of mainstream partners to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective. The case studies examined showed repeated examples in which mainstream partners demonstrated a desire to learn and incorporate new approaches in their work. In particular, these included: preparedness to critically reflect on assumptions underlying their approach and practices; expanding their ways of thinking to incorporate this and other principles; and developing cultural awareness to appreciate difference and the broader organisational cultural competence necessary to inform and implement different ways of working. The case studies also highlight examples where different ways of working continue to provide challenges for both partners and impede relationship development. For example, different cultural understandings of and approaches to program evaluation create tension in relationships, and differences in Aboriginal professionalism continue to see some ACCO staff members not recognised and respected for the cultural knowledge and skills they posses. Practices that were most successful in aligning understanding and overcoming these challenges included integrated staffing arrangements, joint staff training and joint development of evaluation processes; enabling significant opportunities for shared learning between staff members. It is important to note, however, that 'aligned' understanding should parallel cultural competency development for mainstream partners, and reflect increased incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, rather than a requirement for ACCOs to align with mainstream practice.

Ultimately, practice demonstrates that where these principles are embedded in the

structures, processes and practices of partner organisations they contribute to improved service development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This is particularly the case where the principles are supported by upper management and consciously filtered through to staff at other levels of service delivery. The eight principles are deeply connected; however, the presence of one principle does not necessarily determine the presence of others. For example, while there may be a commitment to redressing unequal structures, through transferring service provision responsibilities to ACCOs, if there is no inclusion of proper processes to discuss whether this fits with the ACCOs' objectives and the accompanying support processes this would require, it could undermine partnership trust and the ACCO itself. Comprehensive analysis of the incorporation of all principles in partnerships is therefore imperative. The difficulties and limitations partners expressed within the case studies examined in this paper also confirm the importance of the presence of each principle as well as ongoing learning and reflection to ensure all principles are continually evolving and developing.

The eight principles are fundamental to strengthen partners' capacity on various levels and ultimately improve their service outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Importantly, however, this paper also unpacks key practices that illustrate *how* services can reflect these principles in their practice. These practices provide clear guidance to inform and support partnership development for children and family service providers. They are set out clearly in the good practice partnerships matrix in Appendix D. The practices also highlight important priorities for government policy development. The next section details practical recommendations for how government can apply these principles and practices.

These recommendations are important. The case studies reviewed disclose good practices that support partnerships, but also the ongoing struggles of both partners to realise the good practice principles within their services and in engagement with each other. Implementation of the principles is inhibited by deeply embedded approaches that take time, commitment and persistence to change, as well as inconsistent government structures and demands, and an absence of resources required for their realisation.

Action is critical in order to see real progress in partnerships as a means for advancing capacity of service providers and improving outcomes for children and families, as is envisaged by Government policy and as needed on the ground. In particular, there must be greater impetus and accountability for mainstream partners to apply good practice partnership principles, and enabling structures and resources to realise good practice partnerships.

8.2 Recommendations

In order to promote and support wider implementation of good practice and address challenges identified in this paper, SNAICC recommends that government undertakes or supports the following actions:

8.2.1 Support research and monitor innovative practice

a) Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and research based institutes to undertake research to clearly identify and describe the role of ACCOs in the design, development and delivery of services within partnership-based integrated service delivery models, and incorporate learnings into policy development.

b) Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and research-based institutes to monitor and document innovative practice and the learnings emerging from them, including for example, the participation and role of VACCA within the Victorian Integrated Family Service system.

c) Monitor the AbSec/ACWA approach to building capacity through partnerships and develop a strategy for broader sector and national capacity building of ACCOs with attention to the implications of partnership facilitation undertaken by an Aboriginal peak body.

8.2.2 Identify need

a) Identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for service delivery by ACCOs.

b) Develop and resource a program that uses the capacity building potential of good practice partnerships to address identified capacity gaps.

8.2.3 Strengthen and enable facilitation of good practice partnerships

a) Identify, develop and fund new partnership facilitation roles by, for example, incorporating partnership facilitation roles in government-funded integrated service systems and service contract specifications.

b) Regulate required cultural competence standards necessary for facilitating genuine and respectful partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream service providers. Section 8.25 details some key steps towards this outcome.

c) Build partnership frameworks based on good practice principles into criteria for government tenders and contractual provisions of service agreements for services delivered in partnership between ACCOs and mainstream service providers, including reporting requirements and evaluation processes.

d) Consistently include funding for the process elements of working in partnership as a separate budget line within budgets for services delivered in partnership.

e) Provide flexible funding models which require service design, development and delivery to be undertaken in partnership between recognised service leaders, including ACCOs. This funding should be multiple year funding to achieve specified outcomes, while providing agencies with flexibility to apply funding as appropriate to particular client groups.

f) SNAICC recommends that Recommendation 8.24(e) be specifically applied in the development of new contracts in 2014 for the Commonwealth initiated 38 Children and Family Centres, to provide a longer term flexible funding model that incorporates a partnership framework, based on good practice principles outlined in this paper.

8.2.4 Resource development to assist services

a) Develop a national resource to support partnership development based on identified good practices. This resource should be targeted for use by mainstream service providers and compliment existing cultural competency framework resources, such as the SNAICC *Working and Walking Together* resource. The resource should include practical ideas and innovative practice stories to promote and inspire good practice. It should also include practical policy, protocol and procedures examples to assist services to set up genuine partnerships, integrated at all necessary levels within the service, as well as a process guide for establishing sustainable partnerships. The good practices identified in this paper provide a strong base to inform resource development.

b) Support an appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation to develop an audit tool for all mainstream services to determine their level of competence to engage in good partnerships in relation to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This audit tool could be used by services to identify areas for strengthening their practice and by government to assist selection of services for service development, design and delivery for services reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

8.2.5 Enable and enforce a sufficient level of cultural competence across the sector

a) Conduct cultural awareness training for all government staff managing service contracts where funded services are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This should form part of broader departmental and government-wide approaches to developing cultural competence and aim to increase understanding for contract managers about the importance of partnerships with and the valuable role of ACCOs.

b) Incorporating cultural competence standards within service contracts for all child and family service providers, reflecting, for example, the inclusion of cultural competence within Community Service Organisation registration standards in Victoria.

c) Mandate the development of Reconciliation Action Plans for all mainstream service providers funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Plans should include a required focus on developing respectful relationships with ACCOs.

d) Work with states and territories to develop and resource a workforce development plan which aims to ensure the cultural competence of all staff in mainstream support service providers which service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families within each state and territory. This is consistent with the recent Productivity Commission Report (2011), which called for "available additional funding for Indigenous Professional Support Units so that:
   - General Indigenous cultural competency training can be provided to all staff without such competency working in mainstream ECEC *[Early Childhood Education and Care]* services with Indigenous children
   - Tailored professional development in Indigenous cultural competency can be provided to staff working in Indigenous-focused ECEC services where there is demonstrated need
   - The units can provide sufficient professional development and support to Indigenous staff."[319]

   SNAICC recommends inclusion of staff and service cultural competence within the National Analysis of workforce trends and approaches impacting on Australia's child protection workforce project that FaHCSIA is currently undertaking as a first step to this process.

e) Incorporate the recommendations of the Productivity Commission Report on Early Childhood Workforce Development in relation to increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, and better supporting their

[319] Productivity Commission (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce*, Research Report, Melbourne, Recommendation 14.8.

retention. This includes Recommendations 14.4 – 14.7.[320]

f) Undertake consultations with significant cultural advice services in child and family service systems to determine any significant resource or support needs to better enable strong, comprehensive and independent cultural advice services.

8.2.6 Inclusion of actions within national planning instruments

a) Include under Outcome 2 in the 2012 – 2015 three-year plan for implementation of the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children 2009-2020 the following action:

    1) Fund a partnership facilitator in each state to support and ensure that each of the 38 Children and Family Centres being established across Australia involve an ACCO in service development and delivery, and implement the good practice partnership principles in that partnership.

    2) Support SNAICC to develop resources to assist mainstream service providers and ACCOs to implement the good practice partnership principles in the operation of the Children and Family Centres.

    3) Increase the capacity and role of ACCOs in out-of-home care services and other service options in all states and territories, drawing on existing innovative models.

    4) Incorporate good practice principles within accountability frameworks for government Child Protection services, including for example, in relation to the implementation of cultural advice services for child protection decision making (see for example: Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Services, Victoria and Protecting Aboriginal Children Together, New South Wales).

[320] Ibid, pp. liv – lv, and 356 – 363, and 373 – 375.

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Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

APPENDIX A
PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES

Contents

Partnership Case Study 1

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC)
Partner Organisation:	UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG)
Key Representatives who Participated:	Alyson Ferguson Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services, GEGAC Kim McAlister Director of Early Years Practice, UCG
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between GEGAC and UCG for the development and delivery of early years services. Both GEGAC and UCG engage in a range of additional community and service partnerships which are not detailed here.

1. Overview and history

GEGAC and UCG have a long-standing relationship that began in the 1970s with collaboration around Family Group Homes. The partnership has developed over time through activities including 'cultural awareness education, governance training, staff secondments, partnerships on particular programs, and education and training of staff.'[321]

In recent years the partnership between GEGAC and UCG in the development and delivery of early years services has strengthened through significant joint initiatives. In 2004 UCG was appointed as the facilitating partner for the FaHCSIA funded Communities for Children, a place-based community development program that focuses on the early years services. Kim McAlister from UCG describes that this role:

[321] Gippsland and East Gipsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GEGAC), & UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG). (2011). *Partnership Agreement between Gippsland and East Gipsland Aboriginal Co-operative (GEGAC), and UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG), May 2011.*

'gave us an opportunity to really strengthen the work that we were doing with GEGAC because it provided a considerable amount of resources and we could negotiate how we could use those resources to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children.'

Alyson Ferguson from GEGAC describes that increases in funding from state and federal government for early years services three and a half years ago found the organisation with a critical opportunity, but lacking the capacity to respond:

'We knew it was really critical because we're working with families that have multiple generations of trauma, so we are flying behind the eight ball in terms of trying to break that traumatic cycle and we really wanted to focus on the early years.'

At the same time UCG was under threat of losing a very experienced worker because of funding constraints. The decision was made to enter into a partnership through which GEGAC could benefit from the early years expertise of UCG and UCG could retain this staff member by employing her in the role of Indigenous Early Years Coordinator, working across both organisations. Alyson describes this early years collaboration as the most critical partnership enabling the development of GEGAC early years services. Kim comments, 'I don't think I've seen a truer integration anywhere of staff fluidly working between the organisations.'

GEGAC and UCG currently work together in a partnership agreement that includes four different memoranda of understanding relating to:

- the shared role of the Indigenous Early Years Coordinator;
- the shared family services reception and early years assistant role;
- the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre and;
- the FaHCSIA funded Indigenous Parenting Support Service delivered through the Boorai Supported Playgroup.

GEGAC and UCG also have a separate Memorandum of Understanding together with Gippsland Lakes Community Health and East Gippsland Shire Council related to the establishment of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre.

GEGAC and UCG collaborate at the broader strategic level as members of the East Gippsland Early Years Committee and have been at the table together for planning around programs such as Best Start and Healthy for Life.

Both GEGAC and UCG describe leadership as a key enabling factor in the formation of the partnership and the commitment of both CEOs to engagement with and support of Aboriginal communities. GEGAC CEO, Jason King works closely and meets regularly with UCG CEO, John Lawrence in shaping the partnership and the direction of both agencies. Alyson noted the long-standing and genuine support of UCG and the goodwill and good faith on both sides 'to give it a go and trust that it would work.'

2. Partnership objectives

2.1 Initial and overall objectives

Alyson indicates that a key initial objective of strengthening the early years collaboration was to ensure that the programs were rolled out to meet community needs. It was also about 'survival' under the pressure to role out government-funded programs:

> *'There was a lot of argy-bargy with the department about what we knew wouldn't work here which was a huge body of work in itself. I was out of my depth and knew I couldn't manage it effectively. You can put a program in and roll it out, that's really simple, but to make it effectively work and make it sustainable is not that easy. That's where it was really good to have the shared worker come on board and make sure the programs were sustainable, effective and worked for community.'*

Kim describes that the key objective in the partnership for UCG is building capacity for GEGAC and for the Aboriginal community. Self-determination is a key principle underpinning the relationship:

> *'It's about recognising that Aboriginal children and families are often in positions of vulnerability or disadvantage and that our work is largely to remove barriers so that they can actively participate and have improved choices that lead to good health, education and connections.'*

The UCG 2010/11 Reconciliation Action Plan describes the commitment of UCG to 'working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a way that empowers and enables a respectful, two-way learning environment.' Further, the partnership agreement between GEGAC and UCG describes the shared commitment 'to Aboriginal self-determination and the priority of ensuring services are developed and implemented in culturally acceptable ways.'

2.2 Shared goal setting and alignment of objectives

Processes of goal setting between GEGAC and UCG in relation to their partnership work are shared and largely informal. While specific programmatic goals are more formalised, partnership goals are often negotiated in the context of responding to the needs that present. Alyson comments that 'there's no formal goals; it's really been hit the ground and work out what needs to happen as we go.' As Kim describes:

> *'I think a lot of the great work comes out of that actual practical walking alongside and negotiating step-by-step, what's the next step and which way are we going to go and what's going to happen… you're just going together walking the track rather than sitting down first and saying we're going to do a, b, c and d.'*

Both Kim and Alyson indicate that the objectives of both organisations are strongly aligned around a shared vision of support for families and what's in the best interests of the children. Alyson describes particularly the support of UCG for GEGAC's objectives and their openness to listen to GEGAC's perspective.

3. Partnership negotiation and agreements

Partnership negotiations between GEGAC and UCG are based on relationships and conversations at all levels. It is the needs and the relationships that ultimately inform the agreements, rather than the agreements developing or creating these. Kim describes that, 'We come from a position of trust. Often we will run with things and start before we have the documentation together if the need is there and we just trust that we're going to work it out as far as resources.' Alyson explains that the process of negotiating the agreements has been straightforward because of the shared vision and that it is only the dollar amounts that sometimes cause tension.

Both Alyson and Kim highlight the importance of flexibility in their agreements and the ways that they work. The partnership agreement and MoUs reflect the commitment to working together but don't restrain the flexibility of day to day working arrangements and the ability to respond flexibly to the needs that present. Though they note also that it is important not to underestimate the value of formal agreements, which clearly describe the commitment of both organisations. A danger exists that success can be based on 'champions' and there is a need to develop protective factors around that. The MoUs are critical to ensuring that work can continue even if there is a changeover of staff. Kim explains that, 'It's that do no harm work. Don't put something out there that will fall to pieces if someone leaves.' The formal agreement itself states that, 'A partnership agreement is acknowledged as a process to make this collaboration more strategic, systematic and as a basis for future growth of opportunity.'

Alyson has described the importance of good communication within the organisations to ensure that partnership negotiations are well informed and do not encounter difficulties. An example provided was a recent dispute over the negotiation of partnership finances, which had occurred between corporate services in both organisations. Better communication within GEGAC could have enabled managers to explain the programmatic reasons for variation of the finances and avoid dispute.

Kim has highlighted that the established ways of working between the organisations are critical to effective negotiations. A recent change had created tension:

> **'***For the first time ever we were asked as an agency to put a proposal forward to GEGAC about the service we will deliver at the Child and Family Centre and that was quite foreign to us because we've never worked like that before, we've negotiated every step of the way, rather than sat down as an agency and said right, this is what we're going to do, take it or leave it or do you like it? That was such a challenge to even write that because that's not how we go about business. We are always communicating, always talking about the next step.'*

Reflecting on the strength of the relationship between the organisations, Kim remains confident that the challenges in this process can be negotiated and resolved without allowing any mistrust to develop.

4. Ongoing partnership management

Formal meetings between Alyson and Kim happen more often at the broader strategic level in multi-partner forums such as the Early Years Committee. There are also meetings focussed around specific partnership activities, such as review of shared staffing arrangements and developing position descriptions. There have been regular meetings in recent times focussed on the development of the Children and Family Centre. The CEOs also meet regularly to discuss the directions of the agencies and the partnership.

While there haven't been formalised planning processes focussed on the partnership, significant shared planning activities take place through the Early Years Committee, in relations to specific programs and in relation to the development of the Children and Family Centre. Alyson describes the importance of strategic planning in partnership to ensure that services provision is proactive rather than crisis driven.

Referring particularly to multi-partner forums, Kim explained that UCG seeks to influence how partnership work unfolds and that they have, at times, 'been firm on what we see as important in a partnership, which would include transparency and participation of everyone in decision making.' At times when deadlines are tight, these processes can break down. In these situations Kim describes that UCG may walk away from the partnership structure, 'but we wouldn't walk away from our relationship with GEGAC.'

Most communications are informal and Alyson describes that if there are issues they will just ring each other. In terms of conflict resolution, the formal procedures in the partnership agreement are rarely referred to, but conflict does inevitably happen. In these situations staff will work to resolve conflict at the lowest level, 'everybody will know about it', and there'll be a lot of conversations at different levels. At the partnership or executive management level, if there is a 'misunderstanding or something uncomfortable' staff will talk about it as soon as they have the opportunity face to face. Kim explains that this way of communicating is very important:

> *'We might pick up the phone sometimes but we'll generally wait for the face-to-face opportunity and talk about it then. That's really important. Emails are to move things along timeline wise, but they're certainly not a good way to communicate if there are things that need some common understanding around or agreement, we'd never use email.'*

Alyson describes the relationship as 'laid back' but highlights the need to be careful that 'it's not personality based' and ensure that systems are in place, including the formal agreements. She emphasises the importance of the two organisations

working well together:

> *'We can't afford not to get on because we don't have multiple organisations up here to work with, and all of us are very aware of that, that we all need to work together because we don't really have any other options.'*

Alyson describes that a key learning of working in partnership is that there is a need to be attentive to the relationships:

> *'You've got to work at them and watch them very closely and check in that everybody is okay, and deal with the issues that arise rather than just put them away and hide and hope they will go away because they won't, they'll just fester and build and grow.'*

5. Evaluation of the partnership and partnership activities

For programs delivered in partnership UCG aims to develop an evaluation framework and measure what impacts the program is having. Kim notes that a lot of this work has been made possible through UCG's role as facilitating partner for Communities for Children, which has a significant platform of evaluation and evidence-based practice. Kim highlights two key areas where evaluation could be tightened:

- sharing of learning: the key aspects of successful programs for families and children;
- benchmarking with partnerships or programs that are being delivered in other Aboriginal communities.

A lot of the evaluation that takes place is related to the push for acquittal and accountability to funding bodies. The data is mainly qualitative and the quantitative data is very hard to gather. Kim indicates that wherever a UCG evaluation process relates to a program they have done together with GEGAC, they would always ask for their input. This works both ways and, particularly in the family services area, UCG staff contribute to evaluation of programs that GEGAC is responsible for reporting on.

Alyson admits that 'evaluation is not our forte here.' Obtaining feedback is not a problem, but time to document it properly is a problem. Alyson recognises the need to develop stronger evaluation processes at GEGAC but also describes significant challenges because 'it's not done culturally.' She provides the example of a culturally appropriate evaluation methodology that is used at GEGAC:

> *'What we've got here internally is what we call a tree of improvements. We've put up a big paper tree and clients can use it, or staff can use it. We have leaves on the tree for positives and we have boomerangs for issues. The boomerangs can be anonymous, and it's all documented in a book as well, so we take the boomerangs and leaves to our team meetings. A boomerang is an issue, so if there's an issue we will talk about it and work out a strategy, and once we've worked out a strategy that becomes a leaf. So there's lots of positives, leaves are all positive stuff, and it works really well here because it's non-threatening, it's non-invasive and it can be de-identified if you want it to be.'*

UCG have provided some evaluation support to GEGAC through inviting staff to evaluation trainings. Kim describes that 'really good evaluation processes need to be embedded in the agency.' While UCG is in a position to have some influence on GEGAC's evaluation processes through involving GEGAC staff in evaluation of shared projects, supporting beyond this is an issue of capacity. Kim explains that 'it takes a lot of time and energy to develop embedded evaluation frameworks across programs, and so as far as our capacity to do that we are really restricted.'

Where GEGAC and UCG staff work together on programs, there will be shared development of evaluation frameworks. Kim describes that it is important that the indicators of success for a shared program are mutually agreed. The indicators need to build in, for example, what the community says is a quality program. Kim notes that often those important indicators may not be captured in a funding or service agreement.

UCG further recognise the opportunities that exist to develop capacity around using evaluation data in partnership. UCG, GEGAC and other agencies in East Gippsland have used the Centre for Community Child Health Platforms Framework which provides a common language tool for looking at all population outcomes. A need exists to develop capacity around how data sets from programs like Healthy for Life are used and inform future design of services in the region.

In terms of review of the partnership itself, this takes place on an annual basis, though does not involve a highly formalised evaluation process. Alyson described this as a conversation in which the focus is not on what has and hasn't worked, but rather on the current needs and what has to happen next. UCG does more formally evaluate the overall engagement of the agency with Aboriginal communities. This has happened specifically through the 2008 Communities for Children evaluation and the 2011 Walking Together Project Evaluation. A key partnership evaluation learning expressed by UCG has been that, 'Partnerships are essential, but can be about power, and you need to promote partnerships of equality through respect, communication and understanding.'[322]

6. Focus on cultural competency

Alyson describes that from the perspective of GEGAC, the culture of UCG as an organisation is critical to the effective operation of the partnership:

> *'It can't just be personality based because it's their culture as well. It's not just Kim and I getting on really well because Kim actually wasn't the initial person, Rachel was. It's the culture of the organisation, it's the willingness of the organisation, that's what works.'*

Kim highlights the strength of having a CEO who has had significant experience working in Aboriginal communities, and whose commitment to cultural competency

[322] UnitingCare Gippsland. (2011). *Walking Together Project-Evaluation Report January 2011*, 4.

filters through the organisation. UCG has a Reconciliation Action Plan that clearly expresses the commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Gippsland region. UCG pursues this commitment in partnership with communities and Aboriginal agencies and Kim explains that, 'Not everyone in our agency will understand Aboriginal culture, but it is about respecting the culture, that's really important, and exploring that and getting to understand it.' Aboriginal cultural training forms an important part of induction process for UCG staff.

With GEGAC in particular, there are various learning and mentoring opportunities. GEGAC's Keeping Place provides a cultural learning place for new UCG staff. Shared staff members and Aboriginal staff of UCG are extremely valuable for sharing about culture and ways of working that filters through at the staff level. Kim explains that, 'one of the critical things is that in working with GEGAC we learn from them all the time. We learn from not just GEGAC, but the Aboriginal community. They actually influence the way that we work.'

Alyson has observed the learning of the Indigenous Early Years Coordinator and her ability to share that learning with other UCG staff to improve their practice with Aboriginal families. The Coordinator connects strongly with families and takes a role as an advocate for the families and the community with both organisations. Alyson explains the challenges for mainstream and non-Aboriginal staff working in an Aboriginal setting:

> *'You can't explain to people who have only worked mainstream what it's like to work in an Aboriginal setting, so a lot of the challenges have been trying to get the staff to accept that it is different and it's okay to work differently. There are a lot of community factors that play a huge part that you would never get in mainstream. Playgroup is a classic; we couldn't just start up one playgroup, we had to start up with two playgroups because of the mob matching. It's hard work to get community to trust playgroup, particularly with non-Indigenous workers.'*

The Coordinator plays a key role in sharing knowledge with UCG staff. Alyson describes that they could have her working for GEGAC full-time, but the benefits to the community from that shared learning are too great, 'She can help the workers within Uniting Care understand why a family might be behaving the way they are because she knows them from over here. There's that education and cross-education that's too invaluable to lose.'

Kim notes some of the limitations on cultural sharing and learning in the relationship with GEGAC are about capacity, and the fact that everyone at GEGAC is 'so stretched and overworked.' Opportunities exist to improve cultural learning together if capacity issues can be overcome. Kim describes that the organisation aims to 'share those learnings more' and apply learnings from shared staff with GEGAC to work in other locations and programs.

Importantly, Kim describes that for UCG being culturally competent as an organisation is about principles and ways of working, 'It's not about knowing what

happens in Aboriginal culture and putting it over there. For us as an agency it's a way of working. It's about flexibility, it's about respect, it's about not one size fits all.'

Alyson praises the level of community engagement of UCG and their efforts in promoting community participation. She also describes the participation of UCG at flag raising and NAIDOC events noting that, 'it's not forced. You can tell it's not a tick-a-box. For other organisations it is and we wouldn't be part of that. That's not the case with Uniting Care at all; it's very legitimate.'

UCG demonstrates a clear commitment to Aboriginal community engagement and partnership not only in its engagement practice, but also through evaluation of community engagement and a willingness to share learning. The UCG Walking Together Project report describes that, 'It is important to add to the body of knowledge in respect to community development with Indigenous communities and share what approaches have worked…One aim of this report is to empower and encourage greater connection with Indigenous communities.'[323]

The clear commitment of UCG to self-determination opens the question of whether and to what extent UCG, as a mainstream agency, should be involved in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. UCG provide a useful description of their perspective on this role:

> *'It could be argued that local Aboriginal organisations should do this work, but a couple of realities must be acknowledged - 1) not all community members/leaders will work with local Aboriginal organisations and 2) expectations on Aboriginal organisations to manage multiple programs from State and Federal government has resulted in overload due to issues around capacity to manage a large breadth of programs and respond to high community needs. This project is working closely with local Aboriginal organisations and their key community leaders/workers and provides support to initiatives they are undertaking.'*

7. Focus on capacity building

UCG supports capacity development of GEGAC according to the needs identified by the organisations in partnership. Where UCG holds the necessary resources, staff, knowledge or expertise, the two organisations negotiate how that can be shared or transferred. A recent example has been the identification of a high need for GEGAC for facilitation and administration support around the development of the Child and Family Centre. UCG has been able to identify a staff member with skills to fulfil this role, while the funding for the role is provided by GEGAC, and the vision is that in the future GEGAC will recruit and employ their own staff for this role. Kim describes that:

> *'GEGAC should be the lead and the dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business, but we use the words 'walk alongside' and we choose to walk alongside*

[323] UnitingCare Gippsland. (2011). *Walking Together Project-Evaluation Report January 2011*, 4.

whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do…the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to GEGAC when they're ready for that.'

A recent example of the UCG commitment to provide capacity support and move program areas to GEGAC is the development process for the new Child and Family Centre. The strategy includes a three-year plan for UCG to work alongside GEGAC in the development and delivery of the service while supporting capacity to transition the service to operation by GEGAC in that timeframe.

Kim describes that from her perspective the capacity development challenges of GEGAC aren't necessarily about skills and competence. The expectation on them as an organisation to deliver is huge and the government timelines are very tight:

> *'That concerns me. I don't know that there's a lot of conversation and acknowledgement around the organisation's capacity to do what they [the government] think needs to be done. They keep throwing resources, but then you've got people standing there trying to juggle all this.'*

The 2011 UCG Walking Together Project Evaluation Report reviewed the journey of UCG in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and identified the need to recognise the time and capacity required for partnership development. Success in the partnership has come from the capacity to facilitate connections between programs and UCG describes this as a key area for consideration by government and agencies:[324]

> *'Whilst many programs require a partnership approach, the time taken for this is often underestimated and means that an inadequate level of time is put into creating linkages. There needs to be greater recognition of the complexities of partnership work and the true amount of time required for this approach to be effective.'*

Kim describes the partnership goal of developing shared capacity. Neither agency would want to say no to any of the resources on offer from government, and if they work together they have the opportunity to 'strengthen the delivery of those resources in a way that will have better outcomes for the communities.'

In relation to governance capacity specifically, Kim describes that the role of UCG is to facilitate and support Aboriginal community and organisational governance structures, rather than to take a governance role. She explains that it is imperative that governance of services for Aboriginal families is 'community owned and controlled' and that UCG has a support role with partners in developing processes such as risk analysis and structures of accountability.

When asked to comment on the contribution of the partnership to GEGAC's overall capacity, Alyson explained, 'It's immeasurable. In all honesty, if we didn't have a

[324] UnitingCare Gippsland. (2011). *Walking Together Project-Evaluation Report January 2011*, 15.

partnership we wouldn't have the programs operating as well as they are. You can't measure the impact of that, it's just been critical.'

8. Further partnership outcomes and opportunities

Many outcomes of the partnership between GEGAC and UCG have been described above, especially in terms of capacity building, cultural competency and staff development. This section captures further outcomes with a particular focus on service access and quality for children and families.

Kim describes the shared worker arrangement as a critical link between the organisations that has improved access to services for Aboriginal families. Community members are more likely to access UCG services because, 'Community members that don't want to come to GEGAC and there are community members who don't want to use an ACCO, will know that she also works at UCG and will see her over there.'

Alyson describes the community kindergarten as a classic example where service integration between UCG and GEGAC supports access for families. Families are comfortable accessing the kindergarten because they wouldn't know that it is owned and operated by UCG, what they see is the two organisations working together. The same will apply to the new Child and Family Centre. While it is vital for the community to view this as a GEGAC project, it is a lot of the back end work from UCG which will make quality service provision possible.

Alyson describes the increase in attendance at the community kindergarten as a great outcome that couldn't have been achieved without the partnership: 'Now we've got nearly 100 per cent attendance at kindy. Three or four years ago that wasn't the case and that's one of the reasons why the community kindergarten was established. We now have a waiting list.'

Kim highlights that some of the positive outcomes of the partnership work for children and families are the result of some 'critical and fantastic workers' who have 'some amazing ways of engaging families and getting them involved.' What is important to the successful work of staff from a partnership point of view is that they feel respected and supported by the management of both agencies. If the relationship between the organisations is good, it reduces tension and stress that impacts on the workers. This supports their work and results in better outcomes for children and families.

Kim describes project funding timelines as a significant barrier to effective outcomes: 'If it was more flexible and longer-term timelines then we would be able to probably engage a lot more families than we are.' Kim also notes that better outcomes could be achieved if funding for partnership work was pooled and flexible, rather than separated into many smaller parts for specific projects.

In terms of future opportunities, Alyson describes that the focus for now is strongly on the development of the new Children and Family Centre, which is a significant long-term project. Kim describes the possibility of greater engagement with and

consultation with Aboriginal community leaders, beyond the GEGAC board. Consulting more significantly and directly with community leaders at planning and evaluation stages could have a significant impact on the design and delivery of programs. She raised the question of how involving Aboriginal leaders and families who don't engage with GEGAC might change the way that services develop. Kim also noted the need to take more time to celebrate the work of GEGAC and UCG in partnership.

9. Aspects of formal agreements

The current formal agreements between GEGAC and UCG are structured in terms of an overarching partnership agreement and four individual memoranda of understanding relating to specific partnership activities identified in the 'partnership action areas' section of the agreement. Further to this there is a separate Memorandum of Understanding together with Gippsland Lakes Community Health and East Gippsland Shire Council related to the establishment of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre.

The key elements of the partnership agreement are:

- an introductory description of the history of the partnership and the nature of the collaboration;
- an acknowledgement of the role of the agreement in making the collaboration 'more strategic, systematic and as a basis for future growth';
- A statement of the broad shared vision of the organisations;
- A list of specific partnership action areas;
- A description of the partnership management structure, including individual responsibilities, meeting arrangements and partnership review;
- An acknowledgement that the partnership needs to be embedded in organisational practice;
- A procedure for settlement of disputes;
- A policy statement about complaints and;
- A brief description of the terms of the agreement including: timeframe, review processes, modification of action areas and, reporting to governing Boards.

Common elements of the memoranda of understanding which accompany the partnership agreement include:

- statement of shared vision;
- project background;
- project scope;
- project timelines;
- project deliverables and;
- project administration and resourcing.

Administration and resourcing arrangements are detailed in MoUs and include agreements relating to:

- shared staffing positions
    - location of position
    - hours of work and division of time

    - rates of pay
    - supervision and support
- project resources
    - funding allocation and schedule of payments
    - wages
    - physical resources, eg. office space, vehicles, computers
    - other program costs, eg. training and meeting costs

Key aspects of the separate multi-partner MoU for the establishment for the Bairnsdale Children and Family Centre are:

- background statement describing the government objective and funding provision;
- preamble, including a statement of the agreement to partner and description of the MoU as not legally binding but demonstrating the commitment of all parties;
- description of the role of the GEGAC Board of Management and their relation to the governance structure for the project, having regard to the fact that GEGAC is the lead agency for the project;
- description of what an Aboriginal Children and Family Centre is including:
    - services provided
    - area of operation
    - holistic and inclusive service model
    - staff quality, staff development and opportunities for Aboriginal people
    - management and direction of the centre by the Koori community
    - funding arrangements
- a statement of key agreements;
- a statement of vision and principles;
- a statement of desired outcomes and specific deliverables;
- description of organisational arrangements including meeting structure, the role of government and key process outcomes;
- a description of other parties
- a description of project meeting arrangements
- terms of reference for the project control group, being the key representative group of MoU signatories in relation to the project and including:
    - role and function
    - philosophies
    - conflict of interest
    - conflict resolution
    - term of the MoU
    - structure
    - review of performance

Partnership Case Study 2

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and Gippsland Lakes Community Health (GLCH)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC)
Partner Organisation:	Gippsland Lakes Community Health (GLCH)
Key Representatives who Participated:	Alyson Ferguson Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services, GEGAC Ailsa Carr Executive Manager – Family, Youth and Children's Services, GLCH
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between GEGAC and GLCH, especially in relation to Child FIRST, Family Violence and Early Years Services. Both GEGAC and GLCH engage in a range of additional community and service partnerships, which are not detailed here.

1. Overview and history

GEGAC and GLCH have worked together over a number of years on various committees, but began to work more significantly in partnership in recent years, beginning with a joint Family Violence submission in 2006. Ailsa Carr of GLCH describes that prior to entering any formal partnership relationship, GLCH and GEGAC worked collaboratively, forming a good basis for later partnership work.

The work of GEGAC and GLCH in Family Violence Services grew out of a partnership approach and currently GEGAC manage the shelter and Aboriginal family violence outreach while GLCH manage the mainstream family violence outreach. There is an agreement between the organisations under which any L17 Family Violence referrals, which come from the police to GLCH and relate to an Aboriginal person are referred directly on to GEGAC who make the first contact.

GEGAC and GLCH have worked most closely together in relation to the delivery of the Child FIRST service, for which GLCH is the lead agency. Most Child FIRST referrals from professionals will come first to GLCH. Alyson Ferguson of GEGAC explains that there was a need to ensure that families had a choice of services and that the initial assessments were culturally appropriate. An agreement was reached and a formal MoU developed. The agreement required that people were given a choice initially to work with GEGAC or with the mainstream service. Where Aboriginal people choose to work with mainstream, GEGAC supports to ensure the initial assessment is culturally appropriate. The agreement also enabled GEGAC to respond to 'walk-ins', which was vital for them, as Alyson explains that, 'There is no way community would have accepted if they walked in here and said they wanted help and we said you have to go over to GLCH before we can help you.'

More recently GEGAC and GLCH have worked together in relation to the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre and have a separate multi-partner MoU in relation to this, together with UnitingCare Gippsland and East Gippsland Shire Council. GLCH have recently participated in GEGAC workshops focussed on the service model for this centre.

Ailsa describes the openness of both organisations to work together and move outside individual silos as key to enabling the partnership. Also, the various committees that they are both actively involved in, including the Early Years Committee and in the Family Violence sector help to facilitate linkages and start conversations.

2. Partnership objectives

As described above, a key objective in entering a partnership around Child FIRST from GEGAC's perspective was 'to make sure community still had a choice and that the services provided were culturally appropriate.' Ailsa describes that overall the objective of the partnership is 'to provide a better service to the client.' She explains the importance of acknowledging that there are members of the community that wouldn't want to use a mainstream service and the need 'to work together around being able to provide the best service to those clients.'

Ailsa also notes that shared learning and new ways of working are key objectives of the partnership work:

'There are always different ways of doing things and different ways of approaching things and I think the more open you are to looking at how things can be done differently then the better the services that you're going to be able to provide.'

Ailsa describes the role of GLCH to support GEGAC in responding to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection sector, and the shared goal of both organisations to ensure all families can access support and children are safe.

3. Partnership negotiation and agreements

The two most significant partnership agreement documents that have been negotiated between GEGAC and GLCH have been the Family Violence submission and the Child FIRST MoU. Ailsa describes that developing the Family Violence submission was a process of meetings and conversations between herself and Alyson, focussed on determining who was best placed to pick up components of that funding. In contrast, for the development of the Child FIRST MoU, the breakup of funding and services was determined by the Department, so it was about how the two organisations would work together in relation to that.

Both Alyson and Ailsa indicate that there were no significant issues in negotiating and developing these agreements. The long-standing working relationship between them made it possible to have honest and open negotiations that were relatively easy. Alyson describes that the Child FIRST MoU is 'all good in theory' but notes that the most significant challenges are around the implementation of the agreement, because it has not been working well in practice. Ailsa also acknowledges the need to 'iron out' issues around how much GLCH 'use GEGAC in respect of the actual client work,' and notes that there are aspects of the agreement that 'haven't been used very often.'

4. Ongoing partnership management

Partnership management, planning and communication between Ailsa and Alyson happen largely through the Child and Family Alliance meetings, which include the Department of Human Services and are focussed on Child FIRST activities. They also work together on the East Gippsland Family Violence Steering Committee and meet regularly in relation to the development of the Children and Family Centre.

There is staff contact and communication around common clients and work done in partnership. This includes:

- case conferencing;
- maternal and child health nursing clinics run by GLCH at GEGAC;
- GLCH disability staff working at GEGAC

Ailsa indicates that wherever possible GLCH will facilitate staff to work together with GEGAC staff, and that this can 'make it easier for the clients.'

Alyson and Ailsa are 'not shy about picking up the phone' and will regularly have conversations to discuss issues that arise. There have been challenges between staff and in those situations Alyson and Ailsa will talk through the situation. Ailsa notes that Alyson will always contact her about issues that arise and describes that this communication is very open and honest and allows them to work through their different perspectives.

Ailsa identifies the time for working in partnership as a key challenge in the work with GEGAC:

> *'Achieving things in partnership takes time. To make partnership work you have to be able to meet and talk things over. It's a challenge to find the time for those meetings.'*

Resources are also a challenge and Ailsa believes this is especially the case for GEGAC:

> *'For example, in relation to Child FIRST they get less funding and they're trying to do more with it and this creates pressure. There's also all the cultural issues and demands on an Aboriginal organisation, which means it isn't often 9 to 5 and this adds pressure to their time and resources. I would think that's a huge challenge for Alyson.'*

Ailsa also describes the pressure placed on GEGAC in the process of establishing the Children and Family Centre and the expectation that staff there will be able to 'just fit it in somewhere.' Developing an integrated service model takes time and a lot of resources. Ailsa believes that a lack of funding and support for these types of projects sets them up to fail from the start. One approach that Ailsa describes as necessary to deal with these challenges is to ensure that existing structures are used to support partnership work rather than trying to create new ones that increase the amount of work and pressure.

Alyson identifies that one of the most significant challenges in the ongoing management of the partnership are the different ways of working of both organisations. This impacts in areas including:

- sharing of information: the GLCH approach to privacy of information for clients makes it difficult for GEGAC to work with families with insufficient information;
- case-management model: GEGAC always adopts an individual case management approach, whereas GLCH may have a large number of different programs working with one family.;
- outcomes focus: Alyson describes that GLCH are 'data driven' while GEGAC are not driven by targets, but by 'what the family needs to survive.' Ailsa describes that there is a strong focus on well-being outcomes for all clients of GLCH that is not limited by a data focus and there is a need to work with GEGAC to unpack differences in understanding of evaluation approaches.

Alyson explains that these different ways of working may be 'cultural' but are also related to GLCH's ethos as a 'medical' organisation and reflect a different focus in the organisation's work.

5. Evaluation of the partnership and partnership activities

The evaluation of the Child FIRST work happens through the Child FIRST Alliance. Alyson believes that the difference in outcomes focus for GEGAC and GLCH is a significant challenge. She describes that the evaluation that takes place is 'the evaluation of data' which is not the way that GEGAC measures outcomes. Alyson also notes that not being the lead agency for this project means that they do not have input into how evaluation of the work is done. From Ailsa's perspective data that has been considered in the Alliance meetings has been from Department input and there has actually not been any significant evaluation of the impact of Child FIRST on outcomes for children and families. She believes an evaluation of Child FIRST with a focus on well-being outcomes for children and families should be undertaken with participation of all Alliance partners.

Ailsa describes that while there is evaluation of partnership work in the formal meetings, there are no evaluation processes around the partnership itself. She indicates that one aspect of the partnership relationship that would be interesting to evaluate would be around relationships between staff. Describing the way her and Alyson are able to discuss and work through issues, Ailsa said she would be interested in learning more about the extent to which that respect has developed at the staff level. Evaluating the openness and respect in those relationships 'might lead us to identify some of the gaps we need to do more work on.' Ailsa explains that review of the formal MoU relating to Child FIRST has been brought up at the Alliance meetings, 'but it is something that we need to factor into our work plan for that group to make sure that it happens.' Ailsa believes that it is important that this happens, and is likely to identify aspects of the agreement that haven't been implemented and need to be looked at.

Ailsa also notes that processes around evaluating the cultural competency of GLCH will be built into the Cultural Awareness Framework that GLCH is currently developing (described below).

Informal review and ongoing discussion around partnership activities does lead to changes in how GLCH and GEGAC work together. A recent example has been that previously in the case of L17 Family Violence referrals, GLCH would make the first contact in response to all referrals. Ailsa describes that it was decided through input from GEGAC, community, the police and other stakeholders that this was not 'the most culturally appropriate way to respond to something as difficult as family violence.' As a result, referrals where the victim is identified as Aboriginal will be passed directly to GEGAC. Alyson describes that the Family Violence Committee was an important forum to be able to discuss this issue with input from various stakeholders and achieve change.

6. Focus on cultural competency

Ailsa describes some of the activities and ways of working that reflect the level of cultural competency of GLCH as an organisation. These include:

- supporting and attending community events;
- acknowledging sorry time;
- acknowledging the Aboriginal community as a whole and GEGAC's role as an integral part of that community; as 'the lead agency in the area';
- displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags;
- forming a committee focussed on organisational cultural competence (see the 'Cultural Awareness Framework Project' described below)

Ailsa indicates that the organisation also uses the DHS cultural competence framework, which connects to the CSO standards for Child FIRST.

Ailsa notes the contribution of GEGAC to cultural competency development in GLCH: 'we get probably as much from GEGAC as they get from us.' Ways in which this happens include:

- cultural sharing from GEGAC held at the Keeping Place;

- informal learning through interaction between staff when services are provided in partnership;
- cultural advice from GEGAC in relation to specific clients.

Ailsa acknowledges that this has been ad hoc and the need to be more 'systematic about getting GEGAC involved when we're working with Aboriginal clients.' She also notes the challenges around sourcing cultural input in relation to Aboriginal clients who don't want GEGAC to be involved.

Ailsa describes that requirements that come from the Department around cultural competency and partnership development with Aboriginal organisations can be unrealistic and place pressure on both organisations. They fail to acknowledge that the process of developing relationships takes a lot of time and that partnerships that are rushed into will likely fall apart. She notes the pressure on the process of developing the Children and Family Centre as an example.

Alyson describes that while GLCH represents a level of cultural competency and knows 'the right things to say' they have a way to go in developing culturally appropriate services and ways of working. She provides the example of L17 referrals where, according to Alyson, GLCH has, in some cases, been unable to make contact with the women and families. Alyson notes the important role of GEGAC in getting out of the office to make contact, doing 'active outreach, active engagement and assertive outreach in some cases.' This is a way of working which Alyson believes is necessary to engage families with the service, but that she believes GLCH would consider inappropriate. From Ailsa's perspective GLCH undertakes active outreach to engage with families, and Alyson's different perspective on this is something they will need to discuss further and work through in the partnership to develop shared understanding.

There are also issues related to the interactions between staff of both organisations and the value of GLCH staff for the cultural knowledge and skills of GEGAC staff. Alyson indicates that this is not an issue of how staff are treated by Ailsa at the management level, but an organisational issue around respect for the professionalism of GEGAC staff and equality in their interactions with GLCH staff.

GLCH are currently engaged in a project to develop an organisational 'Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Framework' which aims 'to develop a set of policies that detail how GLCH will work effectively with the Aboriginal community.' The policy areas under development include:

- cultural awareness training;
- creating a welcome, safe and accessible environment;
- recruitment and employment;
- agency commitment to self-determination and acknowledgement;
- partnerships and;
- culturally responsive service delivery.

Ailsa describes the importance of this process to ensure that the organisation develops cultural competence in a strategic and coordinated way. She indicates that GLCH intends to develop the framework in partnership with Aboriginal communities. Ailsa recognises that GEGAC will have a role to play in this process, but that this becomes hard because 'it's also about not putting too much pressure

on them.' She also notes the challenge of working across a number of sites and needing to identify the most appropriate Aboriginal group and organisations to work with to inform the framework.

Alyson indicates that there is an opportunity for GEGAC to have a greater role in training and support for GLCH staff to work in culturally appropriate ways with Aboriginal people. Alyson suggested, for example, that GEGAC could provide cultural support to GLCH staff around the 'assertive outreach' approaches that are necessary to connect with Aboriginal families.

7. Further partnership outcomes and opportunities

Ailsa describes the increase in employment of Aboriginal people at GLCH as a significant outcome of their partnership work with a number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. This has been a move from having no Aboriginal employees to nine per cent. Ailsa notes that this is not large, but has been a proactive move to support employment, which brings a richness to the organisation. GLCH has pursued a strategy of supporting Aboriginal employment and have been involved with various communities and organisations in relation to this, including with UnitingCare Gippsland and GEGAC in relation to a traineeship program.

Specifically in relation to the Child FIRST Alliance, Alyson notes that it has enabled a small amount of additional funding support for GEGAC's intake and assessment role. However, she describes that it hasn't had a large impact on how GEGAC does business and that, 'it's made a lot more work but I haven't seen a lot more outcomes.' Alyson also describes strongly the importance of the recent shift in process for dealing with L17 referrals as a positive partnership outcome.

In more general terms, Ailsa believes that there has been, 'increased access for the community to a whole range of services, whether they're provided by GEGAC or ourselves.' She provided the example of the Early Childhood Intervention disability service, which had no Aboriginal children enrolled, and now has fifty per cent Aboriginal enrolment. This came out of work done in conjunction with GEGAC's Boorai playgroup.

Alyson notes the significant opportunity that exists, especially with the change in the L17 referral process, for strengthening how GEGAC and GLCH work in relation to the MoU, 'to try and really get that bedded down in practice.' Ailsa describes the opportunity to work on 'the day-to-day work so that there's more sharing at a staff level.' She describes the need to be more proactive about how the partnership works on a day-to-day basis 'because so many things get in the way and it's easy to get wrapped up in that.' Recent staffing stability in both organisations has also created the opportunity to focus on partnership work.

Partnership Case Study 3

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Partner Organisation:	Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS)
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between VACCA and DHS in relation to the Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Services (ACSASS) provided by the VACCA Lakidjeka Program.

This case study remains confidential as finalisation and approval of the content of the case study was not completed in the research period. Both VACCA and DHS have supported the SNAICC research process and the case study has contributed significantly to the paper.

Partnership Case Study 4

Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA) and Save the Children

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA)
Partner Organisation:	Save the Children
Key Representatives who Participated:	Jane Parker Coordinator, WELA Alu D'Anna Trust, WELA Stronger Woman's Coordinator Estelle Hunter Chairperson, Management Committee, WELA Anthea Whan Early Learning Program Coordinator Save the Children

1. Overview and history

The Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA) started as a community initiative for young mothers and babies at the recreation centre in Wyndham. Estelle, Chairperson of the WELA Management Committee, explains that the initial objective was to have a meeting place in public so other Mums could join and families could be supported.

Save the Children became involved in 2005 as the facilitating partner for the FaHCSIA funded Communities for Children (CfC) program, and arrived in the region with a need to identify an Aboriginal organisation with capacity to take on the CfC funding. The young mothers and babies group was identified as the program to build on in Wyndham, and Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation was identified as the incorporated body to administer the program.

Jane Parker, the current coordinator of WELA, took up her role at this time. She describes that at that point the group was:

> *'A group of Aboriginal mums that felt that the mainstream services weren't meeting their needs. They were meeting regularly using whatever resources they could get to get something going to build capacity for them and their children.'*

Estelle describes that Jane coming into the position of coordinator was a big help: 'She is a white woman but knows everyone and everyone has so much respect for her, she saw us grow up.' Since this time, and with the continuing involvement and support of Save the Children, WELA has become an independent corporation and evolved from a playgroup to a broader service with activities including:

- focussed learning for children with their Mums
- preparing children for school and supporting the transition to school
- focus in areas including child development, play with children, health and nutrition
- a breakfast club which includes older children before school
- a women's centre which provide gardening and sewing courses
- home visits
- linkages to other services

Jane explains that: 'to make a difference in a child's life you have to make a difference to the family. You need to work with the whole family: washing hands, eating healthy, speaking to your child, having conversations.' WELA plans to continue to grow and expand its service and to increase its focus on support for fathers.

2. Principles that underpin the partnership approach

Anthea Whan from Save the Children identifies a number of key principles that underpin the work of Save the Children in partnership with WELA:

- It is not about the image or growth of Save the Children, it is about support for WELA to fulfil their objectives.
- 'Ideally we wouldn't be here in 20 or 50 years, so it is important for us to build capacity locally.
- 'It is about seeing what we could/can do, as much or little as they wanted. It is taking their lead on it. The program was dictated by what they thought would work within the community.'
- The partnership takes a strengths based approach and is set up to build on the strong group of young Mums that was already operating.
- We suggest possibilities and they identify priorities: 'It is about them understanding through our actions what we actually are capable of doing for them.'
- 'To move forward together is about sensitivity to the process.'
- It is about patience, working with the staff and taking their lead.
- The goal is transferring programs to communities.

Jane provides a reflection on how these principles translate into reality in Wyndham:

> *'We are them in Wyndham. We are the face of Save the Children here. They are supportive of whatever we do with the community and service around these issues, and they defer to us on these issues. They don't have direct interaction with the community here.'*

Jane describes key principles, which underpin the work of WELA with Save the Children:

- everything that they do with Save the Children should be relevant to the community in Wyndham.
- the aim is to respond to what the community wants and WELA needs the flexibility to adapt to expressed community needs.
- the focus is providing the service and they do not want to become 'an office or a bureaucracy.'
- WELA needs to grow in order to provide a holistic service to the community, which addresses all the needs of families.
- developing strong community leaders is key, including employment and training of local people and having a local board of management.
- cultural awareness of Save the Children staff is critical to effective relationships.

3. Enabling factors

Anthea highlights the Communities for Children program was a major instigator of the work in Wyndham: 'It was the whole reason we came up here.' She commends the CfC approach noting that 'having facilitating partners lets it be so flexible in being able to respond to community needs.'

Anthea also notes that the active role Jane takes is key to making the partnership possible. She is very knowledgeable and has strong experience of being a Shire councillor for many years. Jane 'really knows what she can push people for and she is not afraid to ask.'

Relationship building and cultural competency are other key enabling factors which are detailed further below.

4. Challenges in developing the partnership

A challenge at the outset was that WELA had never worked with Save the Children or the Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation before. Anthea describes that this was a big step and from WELA's perspective they wanted 'to ensure that they still retained ownership over their program.' Anthea believes the level of growth was challenging and 'scary at times' for WELA. The process involved 'going from something working really well to going under the umbrella of another organisation that had never worked on early childhood programs.'

Jane indicates that sustainable funding has been one of the most significant challenges from the beginning: 'None of our funding agreements are long term, they are all one year. So it is really hard to build a sustainable program and service when you go from one year to the next. That has been the hardship for us all.' She views the approach of government to funding partnership activities as impacting negatively on how the partnership works:

> *'Basically we are all ultimately working to whatever the Minister's department is wanting from us every year and trying to make that fit within our*

communities and services. It should never come from the top down but should be from the bottom to the top. They should be coming to us saying what is happening, what are the gaps, what are the weaknesses, what needs to be built on an, how can we grow the centre.'

Jane also notes the challenges in relation to the cultural awareness of Save the Children staff at the beginning of the partnership, which are detailed in the focus on cultural competency below.

5. Agreements and objectives

Anthea describes that 'there was no process of setting up the goals and objectives of each organisation for the partnership.' There would have been discussion around why WELA would want to partner with Save the Children and what Save the Children would bring to the table, but this was not formally documented. Anthea indicates that the partnership agreement is a basic funding for service agreement that doesn't reflect partnership principles or the way the partnership works.

Jane describes that the broader priorities of partnering with Save the Children, as provided in the CfCs agreement include: information referral, outreach, resource development support, education and skills training and, community capacity building and development. She notes that the specific goals and activities change from year to year: 'it grew, morphed, and changed on the basis of the need of the community and sustainability of events. The funding agreement then had to reflect this and the outcomes had to be shifted to reflect that.'

A significant challenge for WELA at first was ambiguity in the agreement and objectives. The agenda provided through CfC was broad and unclear:

'We would go and do something and then get feedback that we couldn't do that or you have to do this, so we would change it and try something else. So we morphed our way through the first year. Then we sat down at the end of that with Save the Children and developed a more tailored funding agreement to reflect what we were capable of doing and confident in doing. As our skills base grew and the resources that we had at our disposal grew then we could meet more of the outcomes and develop the activities.'

Anthea believes that defining how the partnership works through a formal agreement could be important, especially for ensuring that approaches are sustained when staff turnover occurs. She explains that currently WELA know what support can be provided by Save the Children, but a partnership MoU may be important for the future.

6. Ongoing partnership management

6.1 Relationship development

WELA and Save the Children describe a focus on relationship development in the early days of the partnership as crucial to the success of the partnership. Both

Anthea and Jane identify the importance of family events, including family gatherings and street parties, which helped to build relationships and trust in the community. Jane notes that these events were also very important for building morale in the community:

'We had had a string of suicides, like 12 over 2 years and mostly young men. Economic downfall, lots of services moving out of the town, no employment opportunities. It started to build on the foundation of the town to start changing some of the negatives to positives.'

Anthea describes that her own work with WELA has been about patience: 'having and giving time to establish the relationship. I probably spent the first 6 months focused on building the relationship with WELA, going up there very regularly.' Anthea also describes this as a learning curve for Save the Children: 'we needed to integrate partnership processes, including the time involved in developing and maintaining the partnership, the mentorship role. Taking that time, waiting to hear from the community.'

Early in the partnership there were significant challenges in developing relationships. Jane explains that initially there was one person from Save the Children who 'had been dumped in the East Kimberley with a huge task and a huge bucket of money. So the first year was a steep learning curve for all of us about how this partnership would work and what was possible through it.'

A crucial turning point in the relationship was when Save the Children employed a local Aboriginal person to take on the management of the program. Jane explains: 'When Eddie took over things changed. He is from this country and is a black fella. That gave them the strength for people to say this mob are serious and they are going to stay.' Anthea describes that it was 'important in fulfilling that cultural link, and the respect that was not previously there.' At this time the number of staff working with Save the Children also increased. Jane describes that 'as they strengthened and their presence in the Kimberley grew, our relationship with them also strengthened.'

An ongoing challenge for WELA has been the turnover of Save the Children staff, which has required them to regularly develop new relationships. The new Early Learning Program Coordinator starting in January 2012 will be the fourth since 2005. Jane explains by comparison Save the Children have 'had it easy as we haven't changed. It has been the same people for the entire time.' On the positive side, Jane explains that WELA has drawn on and learnt from the strengths of each new Save the Children worker, for example Anthea's strengths in finance and accounting. Jane describes that this informal learning 'contributes to the effectiveness of the partnership and a lot of the outcomes in real terms.'

Both WELA and Save the Children acknowledge that as a result of the time and effort that has been put into developing relationships between them, there is now a high level of trust and honesty in the relationship. Jane describes that she knows that Save the Children will be there to support if WELA is stuck. She explains that she is secure that Save the Children value her role and the partnership with WELA.

Recently Jane was invited to be on the interview panel for the new Save the Children Early Learning Program Coordinator who will work in the region: 'that shows that they see that we have something to contribute, that we are a central partner and have a voice in decisions around that.'

Jane describes the relationship as significantly different to the relationship with other funding bodies and especially with government. Through CfC 'FaHCSIA have put in a middle man' which acts as a buffer and support. Jane describes that when they work directly with departments the relationship is much more 'cold'.

6.2 Communication

Communication between Save the Children and WELA takes various forms both formal and informal and includes: daily emails; regular phone calls; monthly reports; discussion of evaluation recommendations; review and feedback from Save the Children on WELA's strategic planning; and feedback on funding applications from Save the Children.

Jane explains that she will always let Save the Children know what she is doing. The communication is very open: 'we have mutual trust and mutual openness about where we are going and how we are working.' Jane describes that a sign of the trust in the relationship is that both WELA and Save the Children can communicate their concerns and issues, and it is not taken personally:

> *We love to have little fights. I often tell them they are hopeless. That is what makes it a good relationship – we can have the open and honest discussions now. We have developed to that level. We are not uncertain that they will come back and say fine we will take your funding away. They know that our intentions are to do the best we can for our community and we know that they are here to support us if we need it.*

6.3 Flexible approach

Anthea describes that providing WELA with flexibility in relation to how they operate is important so that decisions can be made at the community level. Jane describes that early on, 'we could define what were the appropriate services to develop. They initially gave us some money and a broad outline and said go for it.' The agreement can be renegotiated according to community needs. Jane explains that if a planned activity is not working well and a new idea is emerging that may be more effective, she will ring Anthea to explain. Anthea will be supportive and the agreement can be amended. Jane describes that this is also important to ensure that WELA doesn't just do what they think is needed, but responds to the expressed needs of mums and the community.

6.4 Planning

Planning happens in a significant way at the end of the financial year when WELA and Save the Children meet to discuss the budget for the following year. Jane describes that this is also a process of review:

I set down a budget of what I need, she sets down a budget based on the money available and then we talk together and look at a compromise. Within that we also look at what projects we have run. What has been successful, achieved outcomes and what hasn't and then we reflect the next phase based on that.

Save the Children also provides input on the WELA strategic plan. WELA will produce the strategic plan and Anthea will provide feedback to assist with strategic directions.

WELA were previously a member of the Communities for Children committee, however with the introduction of the Family Support Program (FaHCSIA) in 2009 the Communities for Children Committee (CCC) membership was revised to exclude community partners. FaHCSIA indicated that this decision aimed to remove the conflict in having members with close financial interests in the programs in attendance at the meetings.

The CCC have ultimate responsibility for the allocation of funding, contracts, and decision making regarding community partner service delivery plans (which are revised annually). This forum includes representatives from the following agencies/organisations who are all actively involved in the provision of services for 0-12 year olds in the East Kimberley: community members, community health, local government, state government (including Department for Child Protection, Department for Communities, Department of Indigenous Affairs and WA Police), federal government, local schools, family support associations, local childcare centre, Aboriginal Corporations and Anglicare WA.

Jane describes that with WELA's removal from the CCC, they have been excluded from regional planning activities. She describes that she experiences the CCC and its decisions now as further removed from real local issues and work on the ground.

Save the Children feel that the separate Community Partner Forum established when community partners were removed from the CCC offers good opportunity for more practical support and opportunities for ideas sharing, and is a more appropriate meeting for community partner staff to attend.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

7.1 Evaluation process

An evaluation for the Communities for Children program in the East Kimberley, including the work of WELA, is conducted every six months by Curtin University. Curtin University (contracted by Save the Children) talks with Save the Children about the approach and the outcomes focus for the evaluation, but not with partners. Curtin University design and conduct the evaluation. Anthea highlights the importance of independent evaluation: 'I think it has meant that our relationship can be maintained and not compromised. If we evaluated ourselves we would be reluctant to raise quite controversial matters.' Anthea views the evaluation as a

highly useful tool for raising issues and enabling conversation about them with WELA. There is constructive criticism, which creates opportunities for the program to develop.

Whilst performing the evaluation is not a criteria of the Communities for Children funding, Save the Children have continued the evaluation process as staff see it as a critical component of continuous quality improvement. It enables exploration of best practices for reflective practice in the program.

Jane notes that WELA has no input into the design of the evaluation. She explains:

> *'I can't see the value of it. They just write up report. We are doing a good job, we are achieving outcomes. I am not sure whoever reads them. We know what our strengths and weaknesses are, we know what we are and aren't achieving.*

An annual review also happens more informally through the budgeting process and negotiation of the service agreement as described above.

7.2 Monthly reporting

From the beginning of the partnership, WELA has had the responsibility to provide monthly reports to Save the Children. Anthea explains that she has been conscious of reviewing this process to ensure that they are relevant and not overly time consuming. Jane notes this as an area of positive change: 'This has been a learning curve. Anthea and I fight over it a lot. The report is quite simple now – is a 30 minute job where previously it used to be an onerous task.' She indicates that WELA has had a lot of input into this process and that this has helped.

Save the Children have introduced a system for WELA to record statistical information in an effort to collect a range of significant data relating to WELA's operation. Anthea describes that data collection has been a 'difficult process' and has been concerned that Jane would see the implementation of this process as a weakness on her behalf. However, the process is about continuous improvement for programs to collect valuable data for funding bodies and to build the evidence base. One way that Save the Children has supported is entering attendance sheets and registration forms into a database and providing WELA with information on their attendance data. Save the Children is preparing a database that they will be able to use themselves. Anthea explains: 'this is done in a sustainable way, building their capacity and systems to take it on themselves. They will have a sustainable tool.'

Jane describes that 'stats are a waste of time.' She explains:

> *All these questions we ask are redundant, recreating information that we already know. The information that we get people to tick: have they had a good time, have they got something out of it; people just tick it and don't know what they are ticking, and move on. It's the positive feedback, and the fact that people come back. If I get 30 people each day for breakfast club we are doing something right.*

Save the Children talked about the need to develop better supportive mechanisms so that monitoring and evaluation is better understood and utilised by community partners and organisations alike. Save the Children felt that this is important to ensure that all parties involved appreciate the benefits that this type of work can bring to enhance projects.

Jane expresses that a recent change means that now Save the Children wants to collect statistics through their own system, whereas WELA used to do this themselves. She explains that WELA 'struggles to get anything back' and that this is a negative process. Jane notes that Save the Children have admitted this is an issue that needs to be reviewed. Referring to the statistical information, Jane explains that: 'We haven't relied on these tools, but common sense and open communication with community and our funding partners.'

8. Focus on capacity development

Developing capacity for WELA has been a central focus of the relationship. Anthea describes that this is about identifying how Save the Children can 'support them strengthening as an organisation' and that it is integrated into planning. The self-determination principles of Save the Children are reflected in the approach.

Jane explains that building capacity for WELA has also been about building strength and leadership in the community:

> *'We also have a couple of generations of shame in front of people, they mumble, they get shame in front of people because that is the culture they grew up in. If we want to break that culture and have these people become role models for the children and community leaders we need to start giving them responsibility to do that, not do it for them.'*

8.1 Governance

Anthea notes that structural changes required of the service were significant and included moving to a stable location, insurance and formalising programs. She describes positively that WELA recognised the benefits of having to follow more stringent processes and was keen to come on board with the partnership. Anthea believes ongoing governance support is important and describes that the management committee has strengthened and are all local Aboriginal representatives.

Jane describes that having someone from Save the Children working closely with WELA through the process of incorporating was very helpful. There was 'significant support' for this process including: advice, skills development and systems development. She explains that, 'without them we would never have got going. Without their corporate knowledge I would never have got the skills that I needed to get WELA where it needs to be.' At this time the Save the Children Program Coordinator was working one to two days per week in the WELA office. The co-location of staff had significant benefits for relationship building, mutual planning

and supporting the process of incorporation.

Jane describes that she does not see the value in some of the processes around developing policies and procedures. She refers particularly to volunteers, organised by Save the Children, who have assisted with developing policies and manuals. She referred, for example, to Occupational Health and Safety policies:

> *'To me this is common sense, and we do it. We don't need a document to tell us this. We are at the school, so we use their evacuation policy. But now we have a whole policy document ourselves. 'It sits in a box and no one reads it. But it ticked boxes…. In WELA, we have a no smacking and no swearing policy. That is what is relevant to our lives and our service.'*

Jane explains that it has taken a while for Save the Children to realise 'we are not an office, we are not a bureaucracy…we try to do what is relevant to us.'

Anthea sees greater value in the volunteering program. She believes that it provided an opportunity for WELA to identify areas for building strengths and think about longer term planning.

Overall, the governance development over the period of the partnership for WELA has been enormous. WELA has grown from an informal mother's group to an independent corporation managing its own account, legal obligations and relationships with funding bodies and, delivering multiple services. Save the Children has supported this growth, but it has been largely due to the independent strength of WELA and its staff.

8.2 Professional development and workforce

Overall Anthea describes that the involvement of Save the Children in staff development for WELA involves making recommendations in relation to training needs that WELA identifies. Professional development in early childhood education has been a focus for WELA. Save the Children have played a role in making training available for staff through Playgroup WA. Jane believes that serious consideration needs to be given to funding the employment of early childhood trained staff who could take on the role of mentor for other staff to 'enable them to broaden their skill and knowledge base.' Save the Children see this as a priority and have worked to source funding for such a role with no success thus far.

Save the Children also contribute significantly to professional development for Jane. Anthea describes a recent example where Jane participated in the scoping trip for the Children and Family Centre in Kununurra. This has provided resources and ideas from other centres that will assist Jane with planning for the next stage of WELA's development. There is also a plan to put training mechanisms in place for another staff member as part of a focus on future leadership. Jane describes that Alu will be 'skilled up for talking to funding bodies, doing submissions and funding applications. Ultimately she will be ready to lead WELA.'

8.3 Funding and resourcing

Funding from Save the Children is static and it is vital for WELA to identify other funding sources. Anthea describes that Save the Children plays a supportive role, linking WELA to other funding opportunities. Anthea explains that Save the Children plays a key advocacy role with funding bodies:

> *'Jane does a lot of this work, but in a really positive way she leans on us to. That is an accepted and valued part of the partnership. She really relies on us to support her case and to go into bat for her.'*

Jane strongly acknowledges this support:

> *'They are constantly lobbying for us, they send us through information all the time. On their website there is a whole lot of stuff on WELA. Save the Children are on the phone for us all the time to find other options for sustainable funding; more reliable funding or; some consistency in funding.*

Jane explains that Save the Children understand that WELA needs to grow the service and provide assistance when the money falls short through helping to source opportunities for funding, give advice around strengthening applications and lobbying government.

Anthea describes that increased funding and resourcing for programs has been a significant outcome of capacity development at WELA:

> *'Because of growing and being incorporated, they have received funding to do a mobile playscheme and they have funding from DEEWR for the parent and community engagement program where they have male workers involved, and they have men's programs.'*

9. Focus on cultural competency

Anthea describes that on starting to work in the Kimberley region in 2005, Save the Children planned to use community development expertise developed in South East Asia and implement the same models here. The organisation saw that it was well placed to manage large government contracts and went for the tender. Contrary to good community development principles, in this instance, Save the Children applied for the funding without receiving a formal invitation into the community. Therefore, a substantial amount of work had to be undertaken to gain that community support.

Jane describes significant challenges in the beginning and that the first person to come out from Save the Children 'did a few culturally inappropriate things.' She explains:

> *'We get a lot of people that come from very well educated backgrounds who have done a number of cultural awareness introductory workshops and things that are just not relevant. So when they get here they think they are experts and tend to become a bit patronizing. But what you learn about people in other*

areas is not relevant to Kimberley people.'

Not having previous programmatic experience in the East Kimberley and direct experience working with the Aboriginal communities in the area, it took some time for Save the Children to understand what it meant to work with the local community and develop trust, and to develop the right partnerships that facilitated connection to the wider community.

There has been no formal framework to inform the cultural competency development of Save the Children and its staff working in East Kimberley. Anthea notes that the focus on cultural competency has increased with the recent Reconciliation Action Plan process and that new staff participate in cultural awareness training. When Save the Children employed an Aboriginal team leader (described above) for the first time he introduced processes including cultural awareness courses for staff.

Jane reflects positively on the level of cultural competency that has been developed by Save the Children in the region: 'they work well within Kununurra. They run their programs there really well and have built an appropriate team, developed relationships and run effective programs.' Jane referred to the example of women from Save the Children attending men's groups and making people uncomfortable. She describes that they have been able to talk through some of these issues and things have changed. The development of honest and open relationships has overcome some of the challenges.

Anthea describes that the cultural competency of WELA has also developed in terms of being comfortable with visitors. The partnership has played a role in diversifying WELA's funding streams, and as a result they have many visitors and are confident in working with them.

10. Partnership outcomes

Anthea identifies that 'there is a direct link between the partnership and the new programs they are running. The fact that they have been able to grow and have Save the Children support them to become incorporated has enabled them to be where they are today.' Jane explains that,

> *'If Save the Children had not come in, there would not be the family engagement, there would not be WELA. They took a chance on a fledgling group. As a program we were solid and strong but as an organizational entity we were brand new. This has been a massive change for our sustainability and capacity for service outcomes.'*

Local employment is identified by WELA and Save the Children as a key outcome. Jane describes that 'they are part of the success of WELA, their personal growth as community women. The building of their skills and confidence is enormous.'

The outcomes of WELA's growth and development for children and families are not detailed in this case study. However, Estelle describes generally that:

'The kids in WELA are a step ahead of the rest. School becomes easy for them, they need more challenges there, there reading levels are really high, their behaviour is good, they know what to do and they do it. They interact well with other kids. They are more independent. The kids share. They are more confident.'

Jane explains that the impacts for children are generational and the long-term effects will only be known when the children grow up. WELA intends to monitor initial outcomes for WELA children through results from NAPLAN testing. Save the Children reinforced this point and the importance of the current evaluation process in supporting the monitoring process of WELA children through their transition to school.

Estelle indicates that WELA's growth has created a sense of empowerment in the community to respond to needs and challenges: 'If we want to change things, or we talk to mums who suggest something, then we talk to Jane and she makes it happen.'

Anthea notes that the relationship has provided an avenue for Save the Children into the community: 'Whenever we go there, we always go through WELA which is great for us to build our respect and credibility with the community.' An example was that the relationship the WELA enabled Save the Children to provide bullying workshops in the Wyndham schools.

WELA have recently won a 2011 Children's Week Award and Anthea explains: 'I think for us it is a real showcase for starting a local mum's group which is now an incorporated body with local community members running it.'

11. Further opportunities

Anthea believes that there is an opportunity for more governance training for WELA to ensure that the organisation is sustainable. She notes that becoming independent from the Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation left a gap, which requires further support. With this support she believes: 'They could be a model organisation in the community that can run programs that don't fit in any other organisation's agenda.'

Anthea explains that WELA is well positioned to take advantage of opportunities because of the relationship that has developed and Jane's open communication. Because Jane reaches out for support and brings forward the needs to Save the Children, new possibilities open up. Jane has a positive outlook for the future of the partnership, as well as the independent growth of WELA:

'We love Save the Children because it did kick-start us. We wouldn't be here without them. But it needs to be recognised that we are growing not shrinking. In the future there will be times when we need them more and when we don't need them so much. The relationship is flexible enough to support that and to evolve with that.'

Partnership Case Study 5

Dalaigur Pre-School and Children's Services

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Dalaigur Pre-School and Children's Services
Partner Organisation/s:	Various including the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) and NAPCAN
Key Representatives who Participated:	Janet Jensen Director, Dalaigur Pre-School Roslyn 'Lotti' Moseley Dalaigur Pre-School Mary-Ruth Mendel Founder and Chair, ALNF Michelle Rose All Children Being Safe Pre-School Program Coordinator, NAPCAN, Port Macquarie
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the approach of Dalaigur to strengthening their service through a variety of partnerships in the community and with other organisations. The work of Dalaigur with ALNF is particularly highlighted as an example.

1. Overview and history

1.1 Dalaigur and the approach to partnerships

Dalaigur Pre-School and Children's Services is a 3-unit independent Aboriginal owned community pre-school which serves the community of Kempsey and outlying areas of Kempsey Shire, including Bellbrook. The pre-school currently enrols 110 children, including 104 Aboriginal children. It has been operating for over 45 years and has been self-managed since 1991. Dalaigur highlights its

independence, and is not affiliated to a particular Aboriginal clan. Dalaigur has an Aboriginal community board and employs predominantly Aboriginal staff.

Dalaigur's principles of operation are:

- Leadership: We provide leadership and solutions to Indigenous Learning that provide the best possible outcomes for our children.
- Collaboration: We work in partnership with stakeholders, leading experts and organisations to meet challenges and opportunities presented by our children and community to build a better future for all
- Innovation and Education: Our success is dependent upon our innovation, creativity and ability to apply educational outcomes to cultural expectations to meet the needs of all stakeholders
- Positive Organisation: Staff skills, experience, knowledge and capacity to be flexible are critical to our success and we acknowledge the need to attract and retain the right people to train and also to achieve our strategic direction

Janet Jensen has been the director of Dalaigur Pre-school since 2004 Janet, who is not Aboriginal, works in close collaboration with Aboriginal staff member Roslyn 'Lotti' Moseley and explains that at Dalaigur Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff always work together to ensure that the cultural perspective is present in all the work that they do: 'We always work as a Koori to a non-Koori, as equal partners.' Janet and Lotti explain that the pre-school is strong in partnerships and regularly seeks to build and promote the service in partnership with other organisations and the local community. Dalaigur engages in partnership work with:

- the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) as a pilot site for the implementation of the Early Childhood Language and Literacy Project.
- NAPCAN for the implementation of the All Children Being Safe (ACBF) program as a tool for developing protective behaviours for children.
- the Kids Matter Early Childhood Initiative to plan and implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies.
- Early intervention services to support children with disabilities and their families.
- Gunawirra foundation to conduct camps which support families of children with disabilities.
- The Kempsey primary school to support transition to school and to conduct leadership programs, sports days and literacy programs that are empowering for the primary school and pre-school children.
- Various community boards and committees for local planning and to ensure an Aboriginal perspective in decision making

Available program funding is often key in the initiation of these partnerships, and Janet explains that 'people come with funding and we utilise it to support our children and families.'

1.2 Partnership examples

ALNF: Dalaigur identified that children were missing out because there was no speech therapist working at the school. ALNF had received funding through DEEWR to undertake the Early Childhood Language and Literacy Project in the region and offered the opportunity for pre-schools to participate. Dalaigur took up the opportunity in 2008. ALNF did testing of children at Dalaigur and Janet describes that 'nearly all failed, which was really disappointing because we thought we were doing a good job.' Initially six staff at Dalaigur were trained to implement the project. Ongoing tracking by ALNF and feedback from Dalaigur staff indicate that the program has been highly successful in supporting language and literacy development of the children.

NAPCAN: Dalaigur has worked with NAPCAN since 2009 in implementing the All Children Being Safe (ACBS) Pre-School Program. This work has focussed on identifying the individual needs of Dalaigur children, family and staff regarding child protection and ways in which the needs can be supported through ACBS. Dalaigur highlights the success of this program in enabling children to talk about their feelings and reducing hurting and violence between children. Janet and Lotti describe that the way the program has been adapted in partnership and tailored to the specific needs of Aboriginal children and families at Dalaigur has been crucial to this success.

Early Intervention Disability Support: Dalaigur works closely with early intervention services to provide support for the families of children with disabilities. This partnership is important to Dalaigur as they believe that identifying disability support needs while children are young is key to ensuring families receive the support they need. Dalaigur has 12 children with disabilities and describes that engagement with early intervention services has increased considerably because the service now comes to Dalaigur and works with parents, whereas in the past parents would not go to the service. Lotti describes that 'parents are more accepting that their children have disabilities now. Previously they couldn't understand this, because they accepted their children as they were and didn't think of them as having a disability.' Dalaigur also partners with Gunawirra foundation to provide further support to these families through camp experiences that reduce their isolation by connecting them with other Aboriginal families with similar experiences and allowing them to discuss issues.

2. Principles for working in partnership

Janet and Lotti describe a number of key principles which underpin the partnership work of Dalaigur:

- 'We'll always say that we'll work in partnership as long as we can put the cultural content in that suits our area.' This is vital to ensure that a program is effective and acceptable to the community.
- Staff of partner organisations need to respect and understand the importance of local Aboriginal culture
- Partners need to be trusting and accepting of the way we work

- Partners should not 'come in on a thought and a theory' but with an open mind to develop the program together. 'It's about working together and respecting each other's thoughts.'
- Partners should be receptive and 'ready to change.'
- 'We don't need to be saved, we just want to be taught.'
- 'We need to have our parents engaged, if they don't think it's good for their children then we will go with them. They are the first teachers and we are the next step to guide them through.'
- 'It has to go both ways. We've got to accept that all children will be mainstreamed, it's a mainstream life and we need to give these tools to these children so that they can go into a non-Indigenous context and take on the world, but they still keep their culture inside.'

3. Partnership objectives

3.1 Dalaigur objectives

The goals for Dalaigur working in partnership include:

- developing quality programs that support children and families
- ensuring the service provides holistic support that addresses all the needs of children and families: operating as a hub service
- providing training and skills development for staff
- obtaining funding and resources to grow and strengthen the service
- promoting Dalaigur and sharing the strengths of their approach

3.2 Partner objectives

Mary-Ruth Mendel from ALNF describes that the overall objective of their work is to improve the language and literacy development of children. She explains that ALNF is guided by the objectives of the community in setting up programs,

> *'ALNF programs were written because the Aboriginal people have been saying to us, now we want you to problem solve, this is the next problem, how do we do this, and we say this is what we can do.'*

She explains that 'when people understand what ALNF does then they want it for their skill set, for their children and for the parents to participate.'

4. Partnership negotiation and agreements

The partnership relationships that Dalaigur engages in are largely informal and they have not entered into any formal partnership agreements or developed Memoranda of Understanding.

At the negotiation stage of partnerships, Dalaigur describes that an openness to different ways of implementing a program that are culturally appropriate for their children and families is a bottom line requirement for engaging in the partnership: 'we promote ourselves as Indigenous education and that's why we always reserve

the right to adapt programs for that purpose.' Where an organisation is not open to including culture, Dalaigur will not work with them.

Both Dalaigur and ALNF believe that agreement making should be a focus and could be beneficial for the work they do together in the future. Mary-Ruth explains: 'we really do need to work out how we do agreement making. If we're going to be working with Dalaigur for a number of years, we need to get it tidy from the front.'

Mary-Ruth describes other agreement making processes that ALNF has engaged in:

- In work with Groote Eylandt and Palm Island ALNF put together a Working Together document and shared this with Elders before commencing work. This established an initial understanding with the community about how ALNF would conduct themselves and also asked the community to add anything further from their perspective.
- ALNF has an MoU in Tennant Creek which relates to the work with the Centre for Indigenous Literacy at the Tennant Creek Language Centre. Mary-Ruth explains that this agreement is important because it creates an entity, 'something that we have that can't just get sucked up into everyday business.' It recognises that 'this is what we do together.'

Mary-Ruth highlights that flexibility is key to the working relationship, but that the framework for working together is also important. She describes the need to capture this 'without getting caught up in paperwork.'

5. Ongoing partnership management

5.1 Relationship building

Janet and Lotti describe that strong relationships develop when partners support cultural adaptation of programs and 'they keep coming back.'

Mary-Ruth describes some key processes that supported relationship building with Dalaigur staff and families:

- visiting and introducing ourselves to staff
- interacting with staff through workshops and accredited coursework
- having pizza nights and information sessions with parents
- being at the pre-school when parents came in to explain what we were doing
- putting posters up about the program

She explains that ALNF 'tends to have a fairly up close and personal relationship rather than just bobbing up, doing our thing and going. It's very participatory. We're around, we're doing things, we're with the kids, we're showing and telling and being there.' Program funding has limited the ongoing relationship and following the initial 16-week program contact was maintained but dropped off after a while because there wasn't a lot that ALNF could do without further funding. The program is now funded for another phase and partnership work will continue.

Mary-Ruth describes that the relationship with Dalaigur has developed over time and that there is now 'a more free and collegiate relationship.' She explains that, 'Dalaigur staff now understand what we have to offer: the skills, resources and understandings that we bring. We've grown up a bit together. As we get to know each other it becomes a more robust working relationship.'

5.2 Communication

Janet and Lotti describe that communication is about open discussion and negotiation of how the programs will work. They highlight the importance of constructive conversations: 'If something comes up and we don't like it, we don't react negatively, we discuss why they're doing it that way.'

Mary-Ruth explains that everyone was interested in 'whether it would work, how it would work and better ways to do it' and that there has been a lot of open communication about that. She also notes the importance of communicating and working closely with parents and children, as well as checking permission and listening to feedback from Elders and service leaders. She notes that partners will tell ALNF who to ask about particular matters and how to ask correctly. Mary-Ruth explains that 'the bottom line is that you've got to keep talking' and what the community wants and how they want it done will change throughout the relationship.

Michelle Rose from NAPCAN describes that relationships and communication with Dalaigur in implementing ACBS have been 'most supportive between staff, families and children where respect, co-operation and understanding have been established.' She explains that face to face communication has been most beneficial: 'we have clearer pathways to what each stakeholder wants and what we hope to achieve by giving each person a voice.'

6. Monitoring and evaluation

There is a focus on monitoring the development of children in the service and the impact of programs implemented through partnerships. There are no evaluation processes focussed specifically on Dalaigur's partnership relationships.

Janet and Lotti explain that one way that they monitor changes that are happening for the children is to make a lot of video recordings. These are used for communicating with parents about children's progress. ALNF also uses video recording as a key approach to documenting progress and impacts. This creates a record for the service as well as allowing ALNF to carry messages forward. Mary-Ruth describes the strength of Aboriginal people in speaking up and having their say about the program and highlights the importance of capturing their voices. She explains, 'paperwork is our domain, but message giving is very important and we try to make sure that's captured.' ALNF also teaches staff and some parents how to do testing and internal tracking of the children. ALNF staff pre and post test children at the beginning and end of the year to assess impacts of the program. Test results are shared transparently with Dalaigur and more widely.

7. Focus on cultural competency

7.1 Culturally appropriate education programs and resources

Dalaigur has a strength in delivering culturally appropriate programs and adapting the programs of others to be culturally appropriate for Dalaigur children and families. Janet describes that organisations like ALNF learn as much from Dalaigur as Dalaigur learns from them. There is significant learning about the possibilities for program adaptation.

Janet explains that a strength of the relationship with ALNF is that many of their resources and ways of teaching were already so culturally appropriate. She referred to programs like 'turtle talk' which have strong cultural links. The ALNF programs are also appropriate for Aboriginal communities who experience high levels of hearing difficulties 'because there are so many visual learning tools.' Mary-Ruth explains that to be meaningful the books and resources that are used must be about the people and their communities: 'Australia is only just realising that Aboriginal children haven't had books that have Aboriginal children in them or pictures that illustrate where they live.' She describes that these resources significantly increase the engagement of children. ALNF also develops and works with Aboriginal language books.

Janet believes that there is not enough support for new directors of early childhood services whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal around including culture in education. She explains that a lot of people seek support from Dalaigur and services are increasingly seeking support in relation to the requirements of the National Quality Standard. Janet notes that Dalaigur is always happy to share its practice with others, but that they also need to focus on their own service and need funding for release time and replacement staff if they are doing teaching and support for other services.

7.2 Consulting with families and community

Janet and Lotti explain that decisions that are made at the centre require the support of families:

> *'No matter what we introduce it goes through the parents first in our meetings, and if we can't get them at meetings we'll get them on bus runs or I'll do house calls and check their issues and concerns.'*

Mary-Ruth describes that consulting with Elders in the community is an important part of ALNF's approach: 'in Kempsey we spoke with the Elders as well and they guided our thinking on lots of important things to do with Kempsey children.' ALNF also works with Elders who teach them so that they can develop first language resources. Mary-Ruth describes that there has been challenges working with Elders in Kempsey: 'Kempsey's a bit different because they don't really have a council of Elders and it's very fractured. We haven't really had that relationship with senior Aboriginal people.' However, ALNF recognises the importance of relationships with Elders, especially when working with young children, and is seeking to build further

connections.

As described above, ALNF has used the approach in Groote Eylandt and Palm Island of putting forward a document to Elders about how they will conduct themselves in the community to build a dialogue and understanding at the start of the relationship. ALNF also works with community liaison officers who play an important role in communicating and organising people for meetings.

7.3 Cultural awareness training

Janet and Lotti conduct cultural awareness training for professionals working with Aboriginal people. They explain this role is important for connecting mainstream services and professionals to Aboriginal people and communities: 'most of the services, especially the country ones, find great things come out of the connection to community, but they have no idea how to go about it, so they're scared to initiate.' The training approach is described as 'gentle and subtle.' Janet explains:

> *'If it's slam bang then you walk away feeling guilty and dumped on and people don't want to change because it's too hard to change. We want people to know there is hope and come away empowered.'*

Mary-Ruth describes that when ALNF works in Aboriginal communities, 'if there's an inculturation process where people can do a culture day or workshop, we try to make sure that happens for our teams.' She explains that this has benefits for the community and also for ALNF because 'our people feel more comfortable and know what's acceptable and what's not.' This will always happen locally.

7.4 Staff linking role

Dalaigur have provided training for an Aboriginal staff member to take a linking role in the relationship between children and families at Dalaigur and early intervention disability support services. Janet and Lotti describe that this link has been critical to making parents feel more comfortable using the service. The staff member has also helped to ensure that supports for the children are incorporated in the classroom.

8. Focus on capacity building

Janet and Lotti explain that the capacity of Dalaigur is stretched and dedication of staff is critical: 'We do it on a shoe string.' They explain that Dalaigur provides holistic care and support for families but often isn't funded for what they do and staff work well beyond regular hours. They provide the example of the Gunawirra camp which staff volunteered to attend because there was no funding. Janet explains that:

> *'If we want the kids to come to school, we've got to look after the parents as well. It's about looking after the community, ensuring that the parents aren't hurting so the kids aren't hurting, and it's working because they're coming to our school. We're always full'*

To ensure that Dalaigur can provide this additional level of support to parents, three staff members have obtained counselling and parenting support qualifications. This extends the role of staff and calls on their passion for the work to meet the needs of the community. Lotti also explains that staff can be stretched by the time and work required for engaging in partnerships and that, 'services would gain from having a release worker to engage in the different partnerships around the community.'

8.1 Staff training and development

Partners have provided important opportunities for staff training and development which is viewed as a key capacity outcome of partnership work by Dalaigur. For example, the ALNF program provides intensive training to staff for supporting language and literacy development and also provides training for ongoing tracking of children's progress. Janet explains that training for staff is about 'empowering staff to go up a level and it builds their self-esteem.' Janet describes that 'just because they don't have the certificates doesn't mean that they don't have the potential.' Mary-Ruth explains that while some Aboriginal staff may not have formal qualifications, their strengths in caring for and supporting children are needed in early childhood services:

> *'We can give them enough specialised learning and understanding and they're really effective with the children, then in time they can go on and do their study as their families get older, but don't miss out on their energy, insights and knowledge of children just because they don't have the qualifications.'*

Janet explains that when she began at Dalaigur staff told her that they wanted to be accepted in mainstream and not looked down on because they worked at an Aboriginal school: 'they wanted to be seen as equals.' She describes that Dalaigur has set out to achieve this for the staff through training and that they have succeeded. Dalaigur has three staff members with degrees and every other staff member has a qualification. Janet explains that qualification requirements under the National Quality Standard are causing mainstream services to panic, 'but we've already accomplished it 2 years ago and we've got until 2014.'

As a result of training provided by ALNF, staff develop focussed knowledge about the children in their care and talk about this with parents, colleagues and outside professionals such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists. Janet explains that 'not only do the staff make better judgements about the kids, but they know exactly where each of these kids are going.' Mary-Ruth describes that 'it goes beyond confidence and into authority: teachers, teacher assistants and family members can say, "I know what is happening for this child and I can talk to others about it and be an advocate for the child".'

Janet and Lotti also describe that ALNF training is appropriately targeted for the staff, providing a beginner course and the opportunity to move onto more advanced learning. There is a future plan for Janet and Lotti to be trained by ALNF to conduct training for others so that they can share the approach with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal early childhood services. Lotti explains that 'the training has enabled me to model and teach for more trained teachers who never got that at University.'

8.2 Teaching resources

Collaborative work has enabled Dalaigur to obtain significant resources to enhance their teaching practice. These have included:

- resources supporting the ALNF language and literacy program including books, puppets and sound teaching cards with visual cues
- a variety of resources to support the NAPCAN All Children Being Safe program, including visual and interactive resources tailored at the request of Dalaigur to teaching for the different learning styles and needs of the children

8.3 Program development

Michelle describes that working with Dalaigur has had significant impacts for the development of the ACBS program for NAPCAN:

> *'Dalaigur's evaluation of the ACBS program which had previously been implemented, conveyed to us that we now need to include domestic violence, trauma and separation into the ACBS Preschool Program. This evaluation gave the program the direction we needed to cater for Dalaigur's individual needs, as these issues are an ongoing major concern to the staff, families and children at Dalaigur.'*

She explains that this learning will have broader impacts on the approach of NAPCAN as they develop and expand ACBS. She describes that 'through our practice with Dalaigur we have gained the necessary insight to be aware that each centre has individual needs…the program must be flexible and adaptable.' NAPCAN recognises that there is an opportunity for services to 'expand the program to fit their requirements, allowing staff, families, local community and children to have personal input regarding the content to be taught.'

9. Further partnership outcomes and opportunities

Dalaigur and partner organisations have described further specific outcomes for the service, staff, children and families that they link to what has been achieved through partnership work. These include:

- Dalaigur has become a service of choice in the area and has a waiting list that includes a large number of non-Aboriginal families.
- Parents have become more aware of the support needs of children with disabilities and support has improved through increased access to early intervention services and the camps conducted for families.
- Lotti describes that 'the primary school can't believe how kids are coming' in terms of their language and literacy development. She links this to the success of the work with ALNF.

- Dalaigur is regularly asked to showcase their work and to share with other services about incorporating culture into everyday learning. They have received a number of awards for their work including …
- Dalaigur employs mostly Aboriginal staff who 'are providing a better service than someone with a university degree could.'
- Literacy practices are changing in households and 'parents are doing literacy based things with their kids that they would never have done before.'
- Through ACBS children have developed understanding of their emotions and developed ways to express themselves. Michelle describes that children at Dalaigur 'have self initiated linking their learning to home' and have been discussing ACBS stories and activities with their families
- As a result of children learning about personal safety and linking this learning to knowledge about their own bodies through ACBS, Lotti explains that 'a lot of hurting and violence at school has stopped.'

Mary-Ruth highlights the opportunity that exists for ALNF to do something more long-term and sustainable with Dalaigur. She describes the concept of a hub that they would like to develop that could include training for teacher and parents and support for speech pathologists and occupational therapists. This would be a dedicated training place where other related resources could be brought in, for example in areas of nutrition and baby care. Mary-Ruth believes that the relationship will need to be more formalised for this concept to be developed. She describes the need for a committee to talk through aims and objectives, find out what the community is wanting and seek the necessary funding. Mary-Ruth explains: 'we need to anchor early years literacy and it needs to have concentrated focus.'

Partnership Case Study 6

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat NSW (AbSec)

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat NSW (AbSec)
Partner Organisation/s:	Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA); NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS); Aboriginal communities and community controlled organisations; other Out-of-Home-Care service providers
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on two aspects of AbSec work in partnership with government and NGOs: 1. The partnership MoU with FaCS for the development and delivery of Keep Them Safe projects with a specific focus on the development of the PACT service. 2. The emerging approach to building capacity in the Aboriginal OOHC sector in partnership with ACWA, FaCS, Aboriginal organisations and communities and, mainstream service providers.

1. The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (NSW) (ABSEC)

AbSec is a not-for-profit incorporated community organisation. The organisation is primarily funded by the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and is recognised as the peak NSW Aboriginal organisation providing child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) policy advice on issues affecting Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities. AbSec's membership primarily comprises of Aboriginal OOHC and family support agencies along with foster and kinship carers.

2. Partnership Focus 1: Keep Them Safe

2.1 Overview of the partnership agreement

On 17 March 2010 AbSec and FaCS signed a Memorandum of Understanding which recognised a commitment 'to working together to improve service delivery for Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities at risk of harm, through better consultation and service design.'[325] The MoU relates specifically to the development and delivery of two pilot projects as a component of *Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing*, which is 'the NSW Government's five-year plan to fundamentally change the way children and families are supported and protected.' The two services identified in the MoU are:

- Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) which is 'an Aboriginal child specialist advice and support model of consultation based on the Victorian Lakidjeka model.'
- Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS) which provides an intensive, time—limited, home based program for Aboriginal families in crisis.

Under this agreement two pilot services are being developed for both PACT and IFBS. The collaborative work seeks to pilot the implementation of two key recommendations of the *Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales (2008)*:[326]

- ***Recommendation 8.5:*** *The NSW Government should develop a strategy to build capacity in Aboriginal organisations to enable one or more to take on a role similar to that of the Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service, that is, to act as advisers to DoCS in all facets of child protection work including assessment, case planning, case meetings, home visits, attending court, placing Aboriginal children and young persons in OOHC and making restoration decisions.*
- ***Recommendation 10.5:*** *The number and range of family preservation services provided by NGOs should be extended. This should include extending Intensive Family Based Services to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families.*

Beyond the two specific *Keep Them Safe* pilot projects, the MoU identifies that further purposes of the agreement are:

- to ensure a culturally appropriate response to protecting Aboriginal children at risk of harm and reduce the number of children coming into contact with the child protection system.
- to ensure the SNAICC endorsed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles are acknowledged and inform policy and service provision.

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[325] NSW Department of Human Services, Community Services, & Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat. (2010). *Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW Department of Human Services, Community Services and the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW)*, March.

[326] Wood, James, Hon. AO QC (2008). *Report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW,* November. Retrieved 25 January 2012, from the World Wide Web: www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/publications/news/stories/?a=33794

The principles section of the MoU further identifies that the MoU will 'set out practical mechanisms for real consultation and collaboration' in key areas including:

- 'building the capacity of Aboriginal NGOs, including workforce development, to deliver child protection services to Aboriginal clients.'
- 'expanding the capacity of mainstream NGOs, including workforce development and cultural training, to foster partnerships with Aboriginal agencies and deliver culturally appropriate child protection and family support to Aboriginal clients.'
- 'developing models for effective consultation and service delivery across the spectrum of child protection services.'

The MoU establishes a steering committee to provide leadership and oversee the implementation of the MoU commitments with responsibility to: develop reporting, governance and accountability mechanisms; identify priority areas for collaboration; produce an annual workplan and; develop performance indicators to measure progress. The principal members of the steering committee are AbSec, FaCS and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA).

2.2 Reflections on the significance of the MoU

The 2009-2010 *Keep them Safe* annual report described that the MoU:[327]

> *'is historic in its nature and it has enabled Community Services to achieve a true partnership with the Aboriginal non-government sector. AbSec has beed 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.'*

AbSec describes a strong working relationship with the Aboriginal Services Branch and senior staff in the Department. AbSec Operations Manager, Samantha Joseph, explains that the MoU 'has created a more level playing field where we are no longer just reacting to government but planning with government.'

Key ways that the MoU supports a more equal working relationship between AbSec and FaCS in relation to the two *Keep Them Safe* projects include:

- AbSec can point to the commitments and agreed processes and as a result, negotiate from a stronger position.
- There is an identified and shared viewpoint about what the outcomes of the work together will be.
- The identification of a 'tangible project' to be undertaken in partnership between FaCS and AbSec creates the opportunity to work closely together.

[327] Department of Premier and Cabinet NSW. (2010). *Keep Them Safe - Annual Report 2009-2010*. Retrieved 25 January 2012, from the World Wide Web: http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/resources/publications

This extends well beyond a typical service agreement in terms of collaborative work between government and NGO staff.

- The MoU ensures that AbSec has a strong voice and a 'seat at the table' at various levels, including senior executive and service development and management levels.
- As a result of the MoU, 'mirrored' staffing positions have been established in FaCS and AbSec for the development of the IFBS and PACT services and have promoted collaborative work between staff on project teams that go across agencies.

2.3 Focus on partnerships for the development of PACT

The PACT service is being piloted in two locations and is currently in the development phase with two sights identified. The tender process for PACT services has included requirements for services to be Aboriginal community-controlled and have a demonstrated quality of relationship with the local Aboriginal community. AbSec was not involved in the selection process because of the conflict of interest created by their member organisations being the likely tendering organisations.

Cross-agency project teams and mirrored staffing arrangements are currently a strength of the partnership for developing the PACT service, encouraging more equal working relationships between staff of AbSec and FaCS. Staff of both organisations identify that there is a positive, open, flexible and constructive working relationship. When attending meetings in the community, staff go together as a project team which is important in communicating that the service is being developed together by government and the Aboriginal non-government sector.

While the relationship is working well at the development and management level it has been identified that a significant challenge will be ensuring effective partnership relationships between the PACT service delivery organisations and local Community Service Centres (CSCs). This will be critical to the success of PACT in providing specialist advice and support. There is a current focus on identifying strategies for supporting effective partnership at the local level and these include:

- The establishment of local implementation groups which will include representatives from AbSec, the PACT service provider, the CSCs and, regional Community Services staff.
- Ensuring at the outset that PACT staff and CSC staff present together at community meetings.
- Developing training for CSC staff that is delivered jointly by PACT and Community Services.
- The development of local level Memoranda of Understanding between the CSCs and PACT service providers.

These strategies remain at the negotiation stage and, for example, the development of local level MoUs has not yet been agreed. The AbSec Senior Program Manager, Angela Webb, believes that this will be an important process:

'from my perspective we need to have something more formal in terms of agreement, something at the local level that staff can refer back to when there are issues.' This approach could be critical to ensuring PACT staff are empowered to address problems and work on a more equal footing with CSC staff.

3. Partnership Focus 2: Capacity building through partnerships

3.1 Overview of the capacity building project

Extracted from the ACWA/Absec – Aboriginal OOHC Growth Partnership Project Plan (December, 2010):[328]

> The Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW (2008) put forward recommendations related to the development of the capacity of Aboriginal agencies to deliver a range of Aboriginal child and family services. These recommendations were accepted in the Government's response, Keep Them Safe. In January 2009, Absec and ACWA submitted to Community Services a proposal for the funding of a joint project for the development of new Aboriginal OOHC services through a partnership between non-Aboriginal OOHC service providers and Aboriginal communities, an approach aligned with the SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access policy.
>
> This proposal was originally mooted at the ACWA conference in August 2008 where ACWA, SNAICC, AbSec and the majority of OOHC service providers signed an in principle agreement for the development of Aboriginal services through this approach. Specifically, the original proposal sought (through collaboration between AbSec and ACWA) to develop new OOHC Aboriginal service providers through partnerships between non-Aboriginal NGOs and Aboriginal communities/agencies in specific areas where there was an identified paucity of Aboriginal agency capacity.
>
> The current proposal seeks to develop partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers to enable Aboriginal providers to be in a position to take on a greater role in delivering a full range of services (including OOHC services when the proposed transfer of OOHC services to non-government sector occurs).
>
> The scope of the development would be based on assessment of the current capacity of the agency/community to deliver services and assessment of non-Aboriginal NGOs' willingness to mentor and participate in the project. It is hoped that the Aboriginal services could be developed to a point where they could offer a broad range of services, which would result in better outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

[328] Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat NSW (AbSec), & Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA). (2010). *Project Plan: ACWA/Absec – Aboriginal OOHC Growth Partnership Project Plan*, December.

Absec and ACWA have been funded to support the development of new Aboriginal OOHC services through facilitating partnerships in 3-4 locations between non-Aboriginal NGOs and Aboriginal communities. The project is in the initial stage of identifying participating agencies and communities and beginning conversations about partnership possibilities.

The government commitment to the transition of OOHC services to the non-government sector in NSW forms an important backdrop to the capacity building project, and is scheduled to commence in January 2012. The planned transfer assists in creating a supportive policy environment for sector capacity building activities needed to make the effective transfer possible. The support of existing mainstream services to build capacity of Aboriginal OOHC services is considered necessary, in part, because of the complex accreditation requirements to provide OOHC services in NSW and the challenges for new agencies in meeting those requirements.

Developing Aboriginal agencies through the partnership model can assist in alleviating the concerns of Aboriginal communities about the transition, which arise because of past experiences of Aboriginal peoples with large mainstream NGOs, including significantly their involvement in the stolen generations. However, the capacity growth required in the Aboriginal OOHC sector is significant. AbSec has recently identified that the capacity of Aboriginal agencies will need to increase from 370 children to 3000, about eightfold and that a further seven Aboriginal agencies need to be developed beyond those initially identified in the capacity building project. There is now an agreement to extend capacity building activities to address this capacity gap for Aboriginal agencies statewide.

The stage 1 transition plan states strongly the principle that: 'ultimately, all Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC will be cared for by Aboriginal carers, supported by Aboriginal caseworkers employed by local Aboriginal managed agencies.'[329] AbSec recognises that it is important in achieving this goal to tailor transition plans to the needs of specific communities. Capacity building support requirements vary considerably relative to location and remoteness is a factor.

3.2 Principles that underpin the approach to building capacity through partnerships

AbSec has produced a position paper on the Establishment and Auspice of Aboriginal Community Controlled Services for Children, Young People and Families (September 2011). This paper describes some of the key requirements for a non-Aboriginal organisation to take on an auspice role for an unaccredited Aboriginal agency.

[329] The Ministerial Advisory Group on Transition of OOHC Service Provision in NSW to the Non-Government Sector. (2011). *OOHC Transition Plan: Stage 1 – The 'Who' and the 'When'*, October. Retrieved 25 January 2012, from the World Wide Web: http://www.absec.org.au/data/files/6b/00/00/00/OOHC%20Transition%20Plan%20Stage%201.doc

While some of these are specific to capacity building for OOHC service delivery and accreditation, most more broadly reflect principles required to enable effective partnership work with Aboriginal organisations. These principles also highlight necessary aspects of a 'transition-focussed' partnership model that has as its goal, Aboriginal community control of Aboriginal children and family services:[330]

Note: The principles below reflect the position of AbSec. Probity issues relating to auspice organisations for the capacity building project are currently being negotiated with FaCS.

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

AbSec has further identified that core principles that are important in the identification of appropriate mainstream service agencies to participate in the capacity building project include that:

- The agency is not motivated by specific financial or growth benefits for the non-Aboriginal service provider, but rather is motivated by a commitment to grow the Aboriginal service sector in order to improve support and outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.
- The agency supports the position that all Aboriginal children in care should be supported by Aboriginal agencies.

Though the project is only in early stages of development, some specific types of capacity building support that could be provided by auspice organisations that have been identified include:

[330] Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat NSW (AbSec). (2011). *Position Paper on the Establishment and Auspice of Aboriginal Community Controlled Services for Children, Young People and Families*, September.

- Sharing infrastructure through initial co-location to reduce start-up costs for new agencies.
- Assisting with financial management.
- Providing supervision for OOHC workers.
- Making training opportunities within the auspice organisation available to workers of the new agency initially and on an ongoing basis.
- Developing local workforce capacity by supporting the employment and training of Aboriginal staff.
- Providing new agencies with opportunities to experience, observe and learn from current good practice.

3.3 Challenges and risks

It is important to note that while the approach has significant potential for building the Aboriginal service sector through partnerships, it is still in the development phase and there are significant challenges to be addressed. While there is currently funding to support facilitation of partnerships, funding to support the actual ongoing capacity building work is needed.

AbSec and ACWA have identified a number of risks associated with the partnership model. Those risks most relevant to partnership facilitation and development aspects of the project include:

Risk Description	**Likelihood**	**Impact**	**Initial Response Strategy Ideas (e.g. avoid, transfer, mitigate, contingency plan etc.)**	**Risk Owner**
Non-Successful engagement of Aboriginal communities and agencies	L	H	Ongoing communication with them. Ensure flow of information to and from is open and transparent.	AbSec
Non-Successful engagement of non-Aboriginal agencies/NGOs	M	H	Need to communicate project from commencement to ensure that NGOs are engaged to participate and provide related services.	ACWA – CS
Non-Successful engagement with CS staff at a local and regional level	M	H	Referral and communications strategies to be developed. Director to facilitate meetings between Local CSC staff, AbSec and ACWA staff and ensure attendance at community meetings	CS
Aboriginal communities do not accept or support the service.	L	H	Ensure relevant Aboriginal communities are appropriately consulted at all stages of the project.	AbSec
Non-Aboriginal NGOs do not wish to participate or do not participate as true and equal partners	L	H	Project to be defined and Agencies assessed as to their suitability to participate in meaningful way	ACWA

Extract from: Project Plan: ACWA/AbSec – Aboriginal OOHC Growth Partnership Project (December, 2010)

AbSec Capacity Building Manager, Barry Lenihan, has a positive outlook for the

success of the project. He describes that a number of the large non-Aboriginal service providers in NSW are coming on board and have expressed their commitment to the principles that underpin the partnership model. Barry believes that early partnership negotiations are proceeding well and there is significant promise for the successful development of new Aboriginal OOHC services in partnership between Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal organisations.

3.4 Significance of the AbSec/ACWA partnership

AbSec CEO Bill Pritchard explains that the development and initial implementation of the capacity building project has been driven through the partnership with ACWA. The partnership emerged from a joint commitment to support service development in line with the SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access policy. The outcomes of the *Wood Inquiry* were a significant partnership catalyst as both organisations recognised the need to work together to respond to the recommendations and influence significant change in the children and family service sector.

ACWA Deputy CEO Sylvia Ghaly highlights that AbSec has strong leadership, a committed board and highly skilled, qualified and dedicated staff, making AbSec a very strong advocate in their own right. She explains that when both peak bodies have a strong and unified message this serves to increase credibility and the pressure on government to listen and respond. Sylvia also notes that further strengths of the partnership work at this time include that there is strong support from the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service sectors for the peak bodies and that the political will and commitment to focus on capacity building in NSW is significant. ACWA relies on AbSec for specialised advice in relation to the Aboriginal service sector and, highlights the key role that AbSec plays in implementing service development projects, which are beyond the scope of ACWA's advocacy role.

AbSec and ACWA are strongly positioned to influence and contribute to government policy on OOHC service development through their position working alongside FaCS representatives as the only two non-government organisations on the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Transition of OOHC Service Provision in NSW to the Non-Government Sector.

Partnership Case Study 7

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Child and Family Service Alliance Members

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Partner Organisation:	Child and Family Service Alliance Members
Key Representatives who Participated:	Kerry Crawford, Executive Manager, Early Intervention and Family Services, VACCA Gabrielle Burke, Manager, Child and Family Projects, VACCA Valerie Ayres-Wearne, Hume Moreland Integrated Family Services (HMIFS) Alliance Senior Project Manager, located at Kildonan UnitingCare
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between VACCA and other service providers as members of Child and Family Service Alliances for the implementation of Child FIRST

1. Overview and history

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) is a Victorian initiative that was proposed out of a review of the Family Services Innovations project in 2007. Child FIRST is part of the Integrated Family Services model, and provides intake, assessment and case management services to vulnerable children, young people and their families, with the aim of intervening earlier to address children's vulnerability and of limiting Child Protection involvement where possible. As Kerry Crawford of VACCA describes, "It is a community well-being model rather than an interventionist model."

Each Child FIRST service within Victoria sits within a Child and Family Service Alliance; a governance structure joining together registered child and family service providers, DHS and other stakeholders within a given catchment area. Each

Alliance has a facilitating partner who Chairs the Alliance Executive and is generally also the Child FIRST provider agency. VACCA (East Brunswick) is a member agency across four of these Alliances in the North & West Metropolitan Region, (facilitated by Children's Protection Society, MacKillop Family Services, Anglicare Victoria and Kildonan UnitingCare respectively). This case study focuses on the work of VACCA in partnership with Alliance members, and especially in the Hume Moreland Integrated Family Services (HMIFS) Alliance, within which Kildonan UnitingCare is the facilitating partner of the Alliance and the Child FIRST provider.

When Child FIRST was rolled out VACCA was concerned that the new model didn't contain any targeted Aboriginal initiatives, including funding for staff positions. VACCA advocated strongly during this early stage to have an Aboriginal strategy and resources identified, so that Aboriginal families were visible and appropriately supported. Alliance members supported this position and funding was redirected from four of the Child and Family Service Alliances upon which VACCA sat to provide for a VACCA staff member to take the position of Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW). The ALW role provides advice and support in relation to referrals that come through for Aboriginal families. This occurs at the intake and allocation stage and once an Aboriginal family is allocated to a mainstream service, to provide support alongside the agency worker. Other Alliance members supported this initiative, as they believed this would genuinely assist the Integrated Family Services model (including Child FIRST) to provide a more culturally appropriate response for Aboriginal families.

Funding decisions for the ALW role were made by Alliances from growth monies from DHS provided in each catchment with the introduction of the Child FIRST model. Following the implementation of Child FIRST in each catchment, DHS funds VACCA directly for the position. The ALW role is funded for 3500 hours annually, and has specific targets attached to it. When ALW funding was transferred directly to VACCA Kerry explains that from her perspective some Alliances had not shifted their thinking to understand that it was no longer their role to determine how funding was spent against the ALW role. VACCA felt it was important for DHS to make it clear to Alliance partners that funding for the ALW role was no longer linked to Alliance funding, but was direct VACCA funding with attached targets. Kerry describes that DHS responded positively and supported VACCA by clearly communicating this change in governance structure to Alliance partners.

The next stage in VACCA's engagement with Child FIRST has been the development of a proposal for a new Child FIRST service to be delivered by VACCA for Aboriginal families in the North and West Regions of Melbourne.[331] This model is described under 'Outcomes and Opportunities' below.

2. Partnership objectives

[331]Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2011). *VACCA Child FIRST - An Intake, Assessment and Referral Service for Aboriginal children and families in the North and West Region*, July. Retrieved 25 January 2012, from the World Wide Web: http://www.vacca.org/resources-information/vacca-child-first

From VACCA's point of view a key objective from the outset has been to work with and through the Alliances to align the Child FIRST model with principles that VACCA believes underpin an effective approach to Aboriginal service provision. These principles are:[332]

> *1. Self determination – That is, the commitment to decisions about Aboriginal people being made by Aboriginal people.*
>
> *2. The principle of Aboriginal services first - That is, wherever possible, services for Aboriginal people are delivered by Aboriginal organisations.*
>
> *3. Self Management – That is, Aboriginal services are responsible for service delivery to Aboriginal families, thereby understanding issues, targeting responses and advocating solutions.*

Gabrielle Burke of VACCA points to Kerry's initial work with the Alliance partners as being critical to get all parties "on the same page…and saying the same thing." A crucial element has been the respectful relationships with service providers and government that were formed over time, before and outside of the specific Alliance structure. VACCA views the Alliance as an "open, transparent meeting of significant people", where DHS are considered a partner, as opposed to a leader.

There is a shared appreciation for the importance of the work. Child FIRST works at the ground level dealing with serious and very real allegations of abuse, where all parties are aware that if a situation is handled badly there will be serious implications for children and families. Gabrielle comments that another strength of the partnership is "that level of trust [by all partners] that an Aboriginal service is the best service to make those assessments about Aboriginal children and families."

Valerie Ayres-Wearne, the HMIFS Alliance Senior Project Manager, describes that during the initial phase, Alliance partners recognised that the ALW role would contribute to culturally appropriate service provision and supported VACCA to implement this initiative through the use of a portion of the growth funding for Integrated Family Services provided to each Alliance when the Child FIRST model was being implemented. This emerged from a shared objective to improve support for Aboriginal families and a willingness of Alliance members to engage in conversations about how this could be achieved and the resources that could be put towards it.

Kerry explains that it was very important for VACCA to have 'champions' to push their cause at the initial stage, because as an Aboriginal organisation there were some elements that were non-negotiable. The open and transparent nature of the partnership allowed these discussions to happen and Alliance members were able to support VACCA positions.

A shared vision, having "somewhere you want to go" as Gabrielle describes, is also a

[332] ibid

critical element, including having someone within the partnership who can articulate the vision and help push towards it. Valerie confirms this, "people always say that partnerships have to have a vision, and in the end those things are really critical, because that's what keeps you at it."

3. Partnership negotiation and agreements

Kerry believes that for partnership negotiation to be successful, the partnership needs to occur from a strategic push within the sector. She feels that government is removed from the day-to-day business of child and family services, and that therefore autocratic, top-down design processes don't meet the individual needs of the sector. What is needed is for the sector to come together to present their bid, their design, to government. Part of this is understanding the available funding within Treasury and then sitting down to have a roundtable discussion about what is needed. The next phase, how the resources are shared and roles within the partnership, can then be negotiated at the governmental level.

Valerie understands that the key to a partnership is also tackling questions such as what binds you together, and what the levels of commitment and accountability are. She feels that the partnership with VACCA is progressing more and more to what she calls the 'higher end' of the partnership scale. She focuses on the quality of the dialogue as a key factor in partnership negotiations, with the secret being "a capacity to keep the conversation going…and not dig in." She also believes it's about working through disagreements constructively, including balancing the fine line between maintaining your own integrity and position, and being respectful, supportive, and knowing "when to stop." It revolves around being aware of questions such as "what are we trying to achieve together, and how best are we able to keep everybody listening?"

Good planning has also been a key ingredient. Valerie believes that both she and Kerry have shared this view, that "you don't have to have everything locked up, but you need to be on a journey, and you need to be keeping on reflecting on that."

Valerie believes that all collaborative arrangements contain a tension; on the one hand they are all still individual agencies, with a level of autonomy, individual funding and service agreements with the government; on the other they are all mutually accountable for the outcomes. She points out that "What that means is that everything is everybody's business in the end." She believes that it is critical for all implementing partners to jointly discuss and define what mutual accountability means within the context of the partnership. This involves conceptualising what the partnership will mean in practice in terms of what individual organisational requirements and responsibilities are. She believes that there can be a discord between what people *say* about partnership agreements, and what happens in practice. Working within the framework of self-determination and self-management that governs Aboriginal agencies adds a further layer of complexity to this. She concludes, "So that real unpacking and clarity on that is critical

4. Ongoing partnership management

4.1 Relationship development

Kerry believes that in the early phases it was vital for VACCA to become known and considered legitimate and credible within the sector. Kerry and Gabrielle both feel that strong relationships now exist between the Alliance members, both between the CEOs and the program managers. VACCA also has a strong and productive relationship with DHS. Kerry describes the change that has taken place over the last few years in terms of meeting locations,

"*Historically you'd see Aboriginal organisation having to leave the office, go and sit in these clinical governmental processes and be…overwhelmed with the amount of non-Aboriginal processes.*"

Now meetings take place at VACCA, and Kerry feels that government has embraced this new attitude towards the relationship. Kerry and Gabrielle both attribute a large part of this change to the leadership of Muriel Bamblett, VACCA CEO. A further change that they have seen in terms of how VACCA is perceived is that the mainstream organisations work closely with them and are very committed to "Aboriginal business", but appreciate that they can't take this on without VACCA's lead.

Valerie describes that it also helps that the agencies *have* to be in the partnership to receive Integrated Family Services funding (which includes Child FIRST). She describes some of the other ingredients required:

> "*You've got really respectful leadership, you've got really good trust with each other - people get that sense of common concern, and we're in this together, this is a shared model, the more we play together the better it will be. Yes we'd like to retain some of our own individuality, however, at least where we can we'll be open and honest with each other. And sometimes it's those intangible things that will really make it all work."*

4.2 Ongoing Negotiation and Partnership Development

Kerry and Gabrielle describe that partnership negotiation is "a daily exercise." They need to be prepared to stand up for what they believe in, and Kerry explains that, "Sometimes you just need to be clear, you're allowed to have your opinion, but we're going forward in the best interests of Aboriginal people."

It is also important to constantly seek improvement and progress. When trying to identify the unique feature of their partnership, Gabrielle comments,

> "*So what is it, about the partnerships in this region, that makes them work effectively and lead to service development – no-one sits on their laurels."*

Valerie explains that the Alliance partnership is characterised by complex structures. The Alliance includes child and family service providers, one of whom is also the Child FIRST provider and who also takes on the role of partnership facilitator, and the Department who are the funder, the contract manager for individual child and

family services agencies and monitors their performance and is the child protection service deliverer. Integrating all of these systems is a complex undertaking, and so it is critical to articulate what you're trying to achieve. It's also important to routinely unpack and analyse what role each organisation is playing, how the relationships are working, and how the expectations of the collective are weighing up against those of the individuals concerned.

4.3 Partnership facilitation

The role of the partnership facilitator is key. They must keep everybody's interests in mind, constantly "trying to listen and understand." Valerie describes that they have to:

"Keep the helicopter view all the time, and…see all the different pressures and how they're all working. But then you try and do something about it together."

She describes this role as being like the glue that holds the partnership together. In recognition of the importance of the Alliance facilitation role, Valerie believes that dedicated government funding is needed to support the Alliance facilitation role - taking carriage of the project to "support, drive and facilitate it." A key strength of the partnership has been having a partnership facilitator who maintains respectful, strong relationships with all key stakeholders. According to Valerie, a key function of this role has been keeping issues on the table, and ensuring that partners don't feel "like they're being told what to do," which she notes definitely hasn't been the case in this partnership.

4.4 Sustainability

One danger within a partnership journey is that key people can leave. Valerie explains, "I'd say within any conversation about partnership, sustainability has to be right up there at the front and centre." Whilst the partnership requires people to actively drive it and create change, it can't be solely reliant on particular people. Valerie considers that a contributing factor to partnership sustainability in the Alliance is that:

> *"The more everyone shares in the commitment, and takes ownership of it, the more likely it will be sustainable. And we've seen that to some degree."*

5. Evaluation of the partnership and partnership activities

Kerry recognises that the partnership routinely needs assessing. The services can be frantic with the responsibility for "keeping families stable and getting them through to the next 24 hours, or the week or three months." The highly intensive and demanding service delivery often takes away from the time there is to reflect with partners on progress. To overcome this, Kerry believes that good evaluation models are necessary, but that current models need to be improved to provide a stronger focus on outcomes for families. VACCA intends to conduct an internal evaluation of the proposed VACCA Child FIRST, as part of their strategic and team plans, and also in compliance with their funding agreement; however this won't include an

evaluation of the Alliance partnership itself.

Valerie points out that the state government has evaluated the child and family service reforms including the implementation of Child FIRST and Alliance partnerships, with KPMG carrying out the review.[333] She notes that a key point to come out of the review is the importance of the Alliance facilitation role.

6. Further partnership outcomes and opportunities

A key opportunity arising out of the partnership has been the proposal, currently being negotiated, for an Aboriginal Child FIRST managed by VACCA and targeting families in the North and West regions of Melbourne. This proposal came about in mid-2011. Child FIRST had grown significantly and so VACCA decided to review the ALW role. It became apparent that demand at Child FIRST was continuing to grow with re-occurring demand capacity pressures leading to repeated periods of restricted intake. With this increased demand, a growing percentage of all referrals to Child FIRST were coming from Child Protection. This included referrals for Aboriginal families. Valerie indicated that in the midst of these increasing pressures, the need to strengthen the interface processes between each of the Child FIRST's in the region and VACCA was clearly apparent. From Kerry's perspective the ALW role was being sidelined, the relationships weren't functioning well and the ALW wasn't taking on many cases. In short, Aboriginal families weren't receiving the support they needed. Kerry notes,

"*What came to our attention was that it was a very cumbersome, clunky system that didn't meet the needs of the most vulnerable people, being Aboriginal. So as we were reviewing the ALW role, we thought that it doesn't make sense to continue to have this mainstream system in place for Aboriginal people before they even get a service. What we found was that the longer it takes someone to engage and receive a service, the less likely that they will, so that means they often escalate into the tertiary end of child protection. So we just thought, let's have our own Child FIRST*."

This proposal coincides with the current Victorian child protection inquiry, during which Kerry perceives that the government is "open to ways of doing business differently, and ways of doing business differently for Aboriginal people." The new Child FIRST will reflect this new way of doing business, as Kerry describes,

"What we're going to have is services that are set up that understand the needs of families first and foremost, because we are those families."

Kerry views this as the 'third stage' of Child FIRST for Aboriginal families, building from initial lack of involvement to the implementation of the ALW role and now towards real Aboriginal leadership. Whilst they initially detected caution from government and the sector towards the idea, they now feel that the Alliances and DHS are very positive about the proposal. Kerry and Gabrielle attribute this change in attitudes to two factors: firstly, the established relationships meant that difficult

[333] KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report, Prepared for the Department of Human Services*, February.

conversations and negotiations could happen, and keep on happening, until the issues were resolved. Gabrielle comments that Kerry's ongoing work building relationships, trust and confidence with the Alliance partners has been critical in getting support for this proposal, "…when everyone's on the same page and everyone's saying the same thing, it's much more likely to happen." If the partnership hadn't been in place she feels that the mainstream organisations could have continued to be quite resistant to the idea.

Kerry comments that a further aspect contributing to the viability of the proposal and support from Alliance partners is VACCA's reputation as a stable, financially viable and quality service provider, having "…a steady measured approach to Aboriginal business. So it's one of those organisations you can have absolute confidence in."

Partnership Case Study 8

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Berry Street Victoria

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Partner Organisation:	Berry Street Victoria
Key Representatives who Participated:	Kerry Crawford Executive Manager, Early Intervention and Family Services, VACCA Craig Cowie Director, North West Region, Berry Street Dayle Schwartfeger Program and Service Advisor, Community Programs – Housing, North West Region, Department of Human Services (DHS)
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between VACCA and Berry Street for the provision of the Indigenous Case Management component of the Northern Integrated Family Violence Services, Women and Children (NIFVS)

1. Overview and history

The Integrated Family Violence program was rolled out as a cross-agency and cross-government response to family violence. Dayle Schwartfeger from DHS explains as part of the Integrated Family Violence response that 'there was recognition that there was a need for an intensive and better funded response to case management for Aboriginal women and children.' Emerging from this, VACCA and Berry Street developed a joint submission to provide the Indigenous Case Management component of the Integrated Family Violence Services, Women and Children (IFVS) in early 2009. They are funded to provide the service jointly until June 2012.

Berry Street receives all L17 Family Violence referrals from the police and provides the intake function for the partnership which includes the broader NIFVS group of

service providers. At the point of intake Aboriginal women are given the option of working with VACCA or a mainstream service.

In mid-2010 Kerry Crawford of VACCA and Craig Cowie of Berry Street came into their respective roles as directors responsible for the Family Violence program. At this time Kerry describes that the partnership 'wasn't working as effectively as it could be…it was on paper only, there was no real considered work being done at that stage.' Craig explains that:

> *'there was a narrative at VACCA that our family violence program wasn't well connected and did not value the holistic model and there was a narrative from our side that we have tried to work with VACCA over a number of years and no one stays in the same chair long enough to do anything. So we weren't connected and we were in this partnership together.'*

VACCA and Berry Street identified that in practice referrals for Aboriginal women were not coming across to VACCA. Kerry explains that there was a need to develop new ways of working and that 'it's not about Berry Street not wanting to refer, we just had to flesh through how this was going to work.'

The first major initiative put in place at this time to address partnership challenges was a full-time staff secondment. Gayle Correnti, an experienced Family Violence program manager from Berry Street was seconded to VACCA for 12 weeks. This provided an opportunity to develop systems, reporting mechanisms and referral processes that were complementary and for Berry Street to develop understanding around how they could fit in with the way VACCA needed to do business.

2. Enabling factors and initial challenges

Specific people and personalities are identified as key to enabling the current strong focus on developing and strengthening partnership work. In particular the relationship between Kerry Crawford and Craig Cowie has been critical. Kerry explains that Craig brings significant experience, a respectful approach to working within the Aboriginal space and a sophisticated cultural lens to the work. Craig describes that Kerry came with a clear vision of what needed to be done which has enabled him to respond: 'without that I could just be well meaning and trite, but there were some tangible things that we could start doing and I think that made a significant difference.' Craig explains that partnership work is supported by other staff at Berry Street who are able to see the big picture and understand why the relationship with VACCA is so important. It was easy to convince others that although the staff secondment would cause strain on the organisation, it wasn't a matter that Berry Street couldn't afford to lose Gayle for that time, it was that 'we really couldn't afford not to.'

The partnership is also enabled by a strong organisational commitment on both sides to working together and a long-standing relationship between the two organisations. Craig describes this as an 'ethos within the organisation' that operates at different levels. The CEOs play a significant leadership role. Craig explains, 'they have such respect for each other and that clearly filters down and

influences how the rest of the organisation is expected to do business in the Aboriginal space.' The two organisations have worked closely together and alongside MacKillop Family Services to develop the *Building Respectful Partnerships* resource, which describes how mainstream family services can build Aboriginal cultural competence to deliver effective services for Aboriginal children and families and includes a focus on building respectful partnerships with Aboriginal organisations. Kerry describes that:

> *'Berry Street is such a strong partner, and such a strong advocate and support for Aboriginal business… I'm sure Berry Street's absolute respect for the business VACCA undertakes has provided the platform for this to go forward.'*

There are challenges in the way this organisational commitment to respectful partnership filters to the staff team level and Craig describes tensions in the beginning where 'the organisations had missed each other.' He explains that the Berry Street family violence team viewed the way VACCA works as not being best practice, while VACCA staff viewed the Berry Street approach as not providing holistic support to families. There were a lot of assumptions made on both sides rather than trying to work through differences. Coming into their roles without having been part of that history, Kerry and Craig have taken the opportunity to begin unpacking those assumptions and working on connections between staff.

Staff changeover, especially at VACCA, has been recognised as a significant challenge initially and a possible reason why the partnership didn't gather the momentum it needed in the initial phase. Staff continuity with Kerry, Craig and Gayle in their roles is now recognised as a strength in developing the next phase of partnership work. Dayle describes that:

> *'People need time to develop an understanding of a new program … there has to be enough continuity and enough interest and a willingness to work in partnership.'*

3. Objectives, negotiation and agreements

The objectives of VACCA and Berry Street align strongly around the commitment to addressing the needs of families and getting to the bottom line, which Craig describes as 'safety and no violence.' There have been significant differences in approach and Kerry identifies the need to unpack why family violence happens and deliver a service that meets the needs of families and isn't based on 'a Western concept of how family violence can be managed.' She explains that Berry Street is well placed to work in partnership with VACCA to do this based on the organisation's:

> *'commitment to doing things in a way that meets the needs of the family, because the families are the experts in their world. We can't expect that women want to automatically have counselling. You have counselling when you're at a space where you can recognise that there's an issue. For a lot of our families, we just need to make sure that they get through to the next morning safe.'*

Craig explains that in working with VACCA it is necessary for Berry Street to understand 'from VACCA's point of view what is it that they need to do business the way they want to do it.' This was vital to address a situation where:

> *'we were just working with Aboriginal families on our own and it was clearly not useful, not culturally appropriate and not giving Aboriginal families the opportunity to have a culturally appropriate service. We were doing our best in terms of employing some Aboriginal staff but they were not connected in with all the Aboriginal organisations they need to be.'*

Craig explains that negotiating a way forward to develop the service and the partnership has been about being open to the conversation and being creative:

> *'it was a conversation about where do we start, acknowledging that we couldn't do everything in one hit. So we decided to start with the priority that we needed to do something different…to connect the organisations and meet the objectives we had in our partnership.'*

This was an 'organic process that has really grown, and we've done a lot of it 'coffee management'.' Craig highlights the importance of moving from this informal process to develop written documents that clarify agreements and expectations. These include the MoU and the work plan for Gayle in relation to her secondment. A new project brief is being developed to detail the next steps in partnership work and a work plan will emerge from this. Craig explains that being clear in agreements is critical where resources are being shared or transferred as this has broader implications for how the organisations operate and there is a need to look at the details of how it will work. While the MoU itself hasn't changed, Craig notes the requirement to negotiate and adapt the service agreement with DHS because the partnership work creates a need to look at targets and rethink EFT allocation. This happens as a process of negotiation between VACCA and Berry Street followed by taking proposals to meetings with DHS.

Dayle explains that a key aspect of the program is 'that there is a relationship that really focuses on providing a joint service between mainstream and an Aboriginal agency. She describes that the work that VACCA and Berry Street are doing together is 'dynamic and evolving' based on a commitment to working through how they can develop the service in partnership, and 'getting on with it.' What is important is that the partnership agreements are being developed as a result of 'a good process that strengthens the relationship' rather than having a situation where 'one party feels the partnership has been imposed.'

4. Ongoing partnership management

4.1 Relationships and communication

Kerry explains that relationships at the management level are supportive, driven by a group of people who are operating from 'the same platform.' The levels of trust in these relationships enable a depth and sophistication in conversations that is changing the way the work unfolds. Kerry describes that the conversations are,

'challenging politically. They challenge the way professionals in the family violence space think they do their work, and in a lot of ways they think that they do it well, but it's not working for Aboriginal families.'

Craig describes that the secondment of Gayle to VACCA and various other staff team interactions are vital to ensuring that relationships of trust at the senior levels filter down to lower levels and promote 'a belief that this is a positive relationship to have.' Staff interactions that are taking place at lower levels include: having the VACCA family violence counsellor linked with the Berry Street counselling team and undertaking professional supervision together and; the VACCA team coordinator accessing supervision from a manager at Berry Street. The process has involved developing systems for working together and this has supported an agenda to 'change the narratives' that have limited effective partnership between staff and change the value they have for the partnership.

Craig describes that there are other benefits that have come out of informal relationship development. He explains:

'I can go to VACCA, walk in, wander about, get a cup of tea, and the next phase is for VACCA staff to be able to do the same. I think that makes a big difference, because when you need to do something, you can just talk instead of trying to get through our systems, which are really hard to break into sometimes, to be able to get to the right person and get the right outcome for the client.'

Craig believes that Aboriginal organisations are better at this type of relationship development and Berry Street needs to work on opening up this space for VACCA staff.

Kerry describes that overall the relationship is supportive and represents a respectful partnership. She explains that the relationship is such that where challenges arise 'we will address them together and be respectful about that.'

4.2 Time and resources for partnership work

Craig describes that it is difficult to find the additional time required to undertake partnership work and that this puts a strain on individual workers and the organisation. In terms of his work with Kerry, Craig explains:

'our diaries are so busy that it's hard to schedule in the time that you need, that's a bit unstructured, to be able to just dream about what you could do. In terms of your priorities, you have supervision, you have all these meetings with the Department, you have all these other things … I made some decisions and dropped some things off. It has a cost. And I'm sure Kerry has had to do the same.'

Staff secondment to support partnership development has also created challenges for Berry Street in having to cover the role, skills and time of one of its most senior and experienced managers.

Craig identifies that the lack of resources dedicated to partnership relationships is a threat to the sustainability of the partnership. He refers positively to the role of Alliance Project Managers within the Child FIRST partnership model who maintain the partnership and do the work that resources the meetings. Craig explains:

> *'If you don't have someone resourcing it, it drops off when we are all busy and we are all going to continue to be busy. We will be going to the Department and asking whether we can use some of the money so that we can have that role in there so it doesn't go backwards or fall off a couple of years down the track … We need to have a way of valuing partnership and Child FIRST seems to be the only program where you have legitimate time devoted to the executive meetings, the operations meetings, that are just about the relationship.'*

4.3 Role of government

Kerry describes that DHS is taking a highly supportive and unique role in enabling VACCA and Berry Street to work in partnership and develop new models and ways of working in the area of family violence. She explains that this is different from 'a lot of government funding where they fund within a particular agreement, but we then have to reconfigure to meet the needs of Aboriginal service provision, but at all times still deliver.' In this case:

> *'they're not actually having these paternalistic constraints around what they think. They're very clear about working in a very fluid partnership, not a hierarchical structure where they're saying: we're the funder, you'll deliver. Instead, they're saying: here's a bit of space, let's see what we can do because this needs to be successful.'*

Kerry describes a unique level of respect in meetings with the Department where

> *'you feel as is you're talking the same language; the partnership is clear; the support is genuine; there's no argy bargy across the table; it really is just healthy advocacy and debate.'*

Craig identifies that key roles that DHS can play in supporting the further development of the partnership include:

- Acknowledging that building the partnership takes time and allowing the time for it to develop.
- Being flexible with targets. For example, targets are currently based on carrying cases and need to take account of the role for consulting on cases and intake. DHS can assist with this and ensuring that the reporting process is not too arduous, 'so that we are not spending too much time accounting for what is just going to be better practice at the end of the day.'

Kerry identifies a number of factors that have enabled a high level of DHS support for the partnership work:

- 'They've really picked up on the enthusiasm and the genuineness of this partnership.'
- VACCA being proud to talk about it's achievements*: 'from a cultural perspective humility is valued and I think all Aboriginal organisations really need to speak up about the excellent work they're doing and really be acknowledged for it. However, it is critical for Aboriginal organisations to be recognised for their work and contribution to service and policy models that influence business across the sector as a whole. Their achievements should be recognised, valued and held up as lead models. '*
- 'It's not just a bunch of meetings, every process that we said we would undertake, we've done it, we've achieved it, and we've moved forward from that again.'
- 'DHS obviously wants to fund Aboriginal business, and wants to see a change.'

Kerry believes that DHS has recognised the value of the partnership without VACCA having to push for that recognition and are communicating that 'we really want to celebrate this when it's developed and hold it up as a best practice model.'

4.4 Advocacy within the partnership

The strength of advocacy that is developed out of the partnership is considered an important aspect of the partnership work. Craig explains that,

> *'advocacy is such a collective notion, you can do it to some degree on your own, but the effective advocacy happens when people are together, on the same page, in partnership.'*

He has learnt that working in partnership significantly increases the voice of organisations with government and the response in terms of funding support.

Craig believes that Berry Street has a specific role to play as a mainstream organisation in supporting Aboriginal communities and organisations:

> *'In terms of say, Aboriginal business, there are some Aboriginal leaders there but they need the second people to come in so that everyone comes in behind them. And that's a role I think that all mainstreams could play. The problem is that a lot of mainstreams want to be the leaders. There are other things to lead on, not Aboriginal business.'*

Craig describes situations in which he has been able to support positions that Kerry puts forward in meetings and that this has encouraged support from others.

4.5 Sustainability and systems development

Craig describes that systems development is the next bit of work that needs to happen in the partnership. He explains that this will be important to ensure that the partnership can continue beyond the work of current staff. At Berry Street these

systems will need to be incorporated within the policies and procedures of the organisation, 'so they are not going to just drop off; they will be embedded in the manuals, in the policies, in the procedures and that will be the glue that will hold it together.'

Kerry explains that the vision for the service development includes significant staff-team integration and co-location:

> *'a co-located team process where our family violence team members are sitting and working with Berry Street quite strategically and we're doing an intake, assessment and referrals process. In the same way Berry Street would be explicitly co-located here. We would have forums that are run jointly by both organisations as a professional learning process.'*

Kerry recognises that a challenge of building in sustainability for the partnership work is being 'at the mercy of the funding cycle.' She explains:

> *'You can have all the strengths of partnership that you want, but when organisations are programmatically funded, you're only as strong as the partners, and the funding, and the commitment around you.'*

Kerry believes that to build sustainable relationships and services there is a need for government commitment to long-term funding support that doesn't leave organisations at the whim of changes in political leadership.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Kerry explains that the new model being developed through the partnership will be reviewed and evaluated and this will be necessary both because of the funding cycle and to show success and improvements. Craig describes that evaluation is 'something we haven't even talked about.' In terms of evaluation of how the two organisations work in partnership, he indicates that perhaps this is another role for the Department to evaluate partnership work and unpack the rhetoric around partnership and the importance of working together. Craig recognises that it was easy to evaluate what was happening before the partnership was strengthened because it was all happening within Berry Street, and it is important now 'to look at the value add.' He believes that it would not be difficult to build on current evaluation processes to capture the experience of an Aboriginal family coming through a mainstream intake and being supported by VACCA. Though Craig notes that this is something he will need to discuss and develop further with Kerry.

6. Focus on capacity development

Craig believes that developing capacity for Aboriginal organisations has a lot to do with getting the distribution of resources right:

> *'I think there are a lot of resources in the sector that could and should go to Aboriginal organisations … I think there are a lot of resources that mainstream services have got that should go to Aboriginal controlled organisations and*

then they would have a better chance, given the scale of their task.'

Craig explains that this is about 'taking self-determination seriously' and that it should happen 'when VACCA says it should happen'; when they believe they have the capacity and readiness to take resources on. This approach is about viewing the resources in the sector as 'community resources' that exist to meet the needs of families rather than being owned by a particular organisation. Craig believes that pooling and sharing of resources could bring significant positive change and explains:

'I don't think that's Pollyanna; I think that that could happen. But it just needs a little paradigm shift for mainstream organisations to think about what it is that we are here doing, what it is that we are on about.'

Dayle explains that it is important to,

'make sure that the resources going to mainstream can be equally accessed by Aboriginal organisations, so that a client has a choice of going to an Aboriginal organisation or accessing a mainstream service or using the Aboriginal organisation to access the mainstream on their behalf.'

Demand pressures at VACCA have a significant impact on the partnership work. Craig observes that staff at VACCA have the equivalent of 'two or three jobs.' In responding to under-resourcing and staffing issues at VACCA, Berry Street have tried to 'say it like it is … This is difficult, how can we help?' A key way that Berry Street continues to support capacity at VACCA is through staff sharing arrangements. Kerry explains the support that Gayle continues to provide:

'She comes and co-locates from Berry Street one day a week as a support and professional development person for the team, and to think of really creative ways of providing women in family violence situations with a service.'

Craig explains that as a result of the work that has been done together and the strengthening of the partnership 'there is more capacity for referrals to be picked up at VACCA now … The next step is to get VACCA involved in the intake process.'

Craig describes that key learnings from working with VACCA contribute to capacity and ways of working at Berry Street. He explains that Berry Street has learnt from the holistic approach of VACCA and their viewpoint that it is not as important to have a family violence program that is distinct from other family support work. This matches well with the desire of Berry Street to link their family violence work to other services they provide. He explains that this is about:

'identifying things we could learn from VACCA, not only in terms of cultural competence, but also a different lense for looking at how you do the work and understanding that everyone needs to have a family violence frame if you are working in family support.'

7. Focus on cultural competency

Kerry provides an explanation of the cultural perspective required to understand family violence from an Aboriginal point of view and undertake family violence work in the Aboriginal space:

> *'Family violence in Aboriginal communities can be quite overt, because we're more likely to conduct ourselves in a public situation, by nature of the way our communities are set up. Whereas family violence in a western concept is what happens behind closed doors and fences, and is very much managed in a different way. It's not because it's culturally acceptable, it's because of how legislatively and politically our communities have been set up, and how violence has manifested itself, from being a people that have been completely abused all their lives by policy. So the whole manifestation of family violence comes from a different space, but violence is violence. It's really about thinking about how we deliver it in the context of Aboriginal strength and resilience, to meet the needs of families and children.'*

Kerry explains that the focus for VACCA is that it should be about a family strengthening and resilience program. 'We're really trying to turn it on its head, move out of this Western concept of what family violence is and address it through a more holistic care team approach.'

Craig identifies the vision for a consultation process that is about having 'a cultural lense that goes across' the family violence work for every Aboriginal family. This is also about 'acknowledging that VACCA aren't going to be able to pick up all the families and some families through choice might not want to go that route.' This could be a process that mirrors the Lakidjeka service that provides cultural advice to DHS for Child Protection cases, and it would enable VACCA to have input at significant decision-making points.

Craig believes that there is a tension in the relationship because of the way that training in Aboriginal cultural knowledge happens for Berry Street staff. The training is compulsory for all staff and conducted internally. Craig explains that there is a missed opportunity for reciprocity because it is done internally and believes that this is a role VACCA may feel is important for them to be involved in. Craig describes that one strategy for dealing with this tension has been to arrange meetings between the family violence teams so that VACCA staff have an opportunity 'to tell us what they think we need to know.'

8. Further outcomes and opportunities

Craig describes that as the partnership develops over the next year Berry Street and VACCA aspire to achieve a reality in which:

> *'there are far more women working with Aboriginal controlled organisations and far more women who are working in mainstream who have a more culturally competent service.'*

He believes that in terms of the service Berry Street provides, 'we are getting there

to be more culturally appropriate.' Craig explains that 'ultimately it is really strengthening the response that can be given to a client by widening the number of choices that a client has.'

Dayle describes that from the perspective of DHS there is a sense of the two organisations coming together strongly: 'there's more of a wrap around of people from both organisations. They are saying 'we are here together to provide a service' and that's the difference.'

Kerry describes that the partnership is unique:

> *'In terms of a large mainstream organisation, such as Berry Street, I think to have such a healthy partnership with an organisation like that is unique, because it's not a paternalistic partnership. It brings together the autonomy and sophistication of both organisations that work in the same space really well and then for DHS to also be a clear supportive partner in that is very unique.'*

Craig describes that given the success of the partnership moving from a close working relationship between the CEOs to working closely across the board in different programs,

> *'I think there is a role for leading the sector in some of that too … Kerry and I can go to some of our networks and alliances and say, this is one of the ways that you might be able to improve the relationship between yourself and VACCA or other Aboriginal controlled organisations.'*

Dayle expresses a positive outlook for the future of the partnership work:

> *'It's got this very rich potential at the moment, that we think that VACCA and Berry Street are working through and teasing out. It's still at a stage where it needs to grow. It needs to get the roots out and the links right through both organisations. Sometimes you watch something and you know that there is an energy there that's a really strongly creative energy. That's where I think this will go. There will be some really interesting things that will come out of this that will be valuable, not only in family violence but also around partnerships and around mainstream and Aboriginal organisations working together.'*

Partnership Case Study 9

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Save the Children

Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Organisation:	Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation ('Larrakia')
Partner Organisation:	Save the Children
Key Representatives who Participated:	Travis Borsi Playscheme Coordinator, NT Nancy Sweeney Playscheme Director, NT Ilana Eldridge CEO Larrakia Kelvin Costello Former CEO Larrakia; current CEO of Ironbark Corporation Tania Mc Leod Former employee of Larrakia; current Coordinator of the Governance Project, Fred Hollows Foundation
Partnership Focus:	This case study focuses on the partnership between Larrakia and Save the Children for the provision of a Playscheme project in the formalised town camps in Darwin.

1. Overview and history

In 2003, FaHCSIA approached Save the Children, an independent non-governmental organisation guided by principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, about the possibilities of replicating their Playscheme program in Darwin's urban town camps. The Save the Children Playschemes provide a range of play and learning activities to children and parental support in the communities in which they operate.

After conversing with different local groups and community members, Save the Children entered a formal partnership with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation ('Larrakia'), a large, membership-based Aboriginal Corporation and representative

body of traditional owners, which delivers funded services to large numbers of Aboriginal people in the Darwin region. The partners came together to deliver a culturally appropriate Playscheme for marginalised children and families.

Lisa Hillan from Save the Children, initially invested significant time and effort to establish the partnership and Playscheme project. Tania explains that, before the commencement of the program, Lisa travelled to Darwin a few times to form relationships and get a sense of how Save the Children could work with the Larrakia Nation in community. Tania stated:

> *'It wasn't done in 5 minutes. [Lisa] took three to six months of preparation. She wanted to get the right people first. That was a big thing. They had a group of three and they did a lot of training before they started. They went to Queensland and did lots of on-the-job training to get their confidence and skill level, what was expected of them.'*

When the partnership was formalised, Save the Children paid an amount to have staff collocated with Larrakia Nation, with accompanying IT support and office space. Larrakia set up an email address and allocated space for the Save the Children staff and program within Larrakia offices. Three people were employed by Larrakia to work on the Playscheme project. Nancy explains that:

> *'We started with a team of action planning. All service providers came together and spoke about best way… to do the Playscheme, what were the challenges we needed to consider, and how it would look like, making sure that it was culturally appropriate for our mob.'*

According to Kelvin, from that point onwards, the Playscheme project essentially operated as if it were Larrakia's project. He explained:

> *'Coordination for the organisation was done jointly. Save the Children attended management meetings of Larrakia. We supported as much as possible their projects by using our resources – e.g. for BBQs. So essentially the Playscheme was a project of Larrakia at that time.'*

The Save the Children Playschemes are now held weekly in four different locations. They are facilitated by local Indigenous staff, who themselves are supported by qualified early childhood educators and professionals from outside the community. The Playscheme project supports the development of an early childhood workforce and local leadership in the community through the employment of local staff and the inclusion of an advisory committee of local women to provide local management to the playgroups.

2. Enabling factors

Several factors were identified as important in supporting the formation, development and success of the partnership.

2.1 Consultation with the local community

Several persons involved in the partnership process at the outset highlighted the importance of Save the Children engaging and consulting with the local community and its traditional owners before implementing the project. Tania emphasised that Save the Children invested significant time and energy consulting with the Larrakia community before establishing the partnership and the program and, in doing so, developed a strong relationship with the local community. This relationship was fostered by Lisa's respectful attitude towards the local community and it's Elders. Tania explained that:

> *'There was a different attitude by Save of coming into the community. You need knowledge of Aboriginal history and to recognise the importance of having that. To take the time to learn about people. And really treat people with respect and as human beings. Lisa did that really good.'*

2.2 Personalities and relationships of key participants

The personalities and approaches of key people within the partnership were also critical enabling factors. Lisa's approach, which was characterised by respect, genuineness, empathy and enthusiasm, was regarded as essential to the effective operation of the partnership. Nancy commented that:

> *'What was unique was Lisa's approach really – the way she worked with people. The respect she had. She always said how much she learnt from us and that she could never understand and talk to the community the way we did. But she gave the space for that. She gave the space for brainstorming and thinking things through from a community perspective. She had enormous knowledge about Aboriginal history and suffering. And she was willing to learn. She cared. It hurt her. The issues and all the money from NGOs going in with little change. This was the premise of her work. That approach governed the partnership.'*

Kelvin reinforced these comments, regarding Lisa's honesty, frankness, and enthusiasm as 'critical to the development of the partnership.'

Tania highlighted the importance of the respectful and non-judgmental approach of the Save the Children staff more broadly and also the significance of the supportive relationship between Kelvin and Lisa. She explained that:

> *'Save the Children were non-judgemental and not hierarchical, they weren't patronizing. [They did not give] the feeling that Larrakia should work in similar ways or set up similar processes to them. They were genuine and very helpful overall – if we had other issues that were going on, they would talk it through, bring in ideas – this exchange became a culture of how we worked together. When I was there, there was no holding information, there was lots of informal engagement about everything, and mutual support and assistance between Kelvin and Lisa.'*

2.3 The nature of the organisations involved

Kelvin suggested that the fact that the partnership was between a local community organisation and an outside organisation with no negative past experiences working in the community contributed to the success of the partnership and the achievement of its objectives. Kelvin explained that:

> *'This is a small community, there are a lot of people here who are not accepted. They come with baggage, and work in services that are meant to provide services to the camps. It was really important that an outside organisation came in and worked with the community, in partnership with a local organisation.'*

Ilana also touched on the importance of Save the Children principles and philosophies to the success of the partnership overall, highlighting that Larrakia's relationships with other organisations have been less fruitful. She commented that:

> *'In terms of working with NGOs, Save is certainly a positive experience. [It has been] markedly different from how we have been able to relate to others.'*

Larrakia's strong relationship with the local community also provided a strong foundation for gaining the community's support for the Playscheme project and for building the community's trust in Save the Children as an outside organisation. Tania described the way in which she helped Lisa establish relationships with members of the local community:

> *'I was quite happy to work with Lisa and go to the different town camps and introduce her to people, inform her about what we were doing, and connect her in.'*

Ilana explained the importance of Larrakia's position in the community to the success of the Playscheme:

> *'What was a very significant outcome for Save was the moral integrity of coming under the auspices of the Larrakia Nation, and that is quite a significant emotional trigger to get good engagement from the community.'*

3. Barriers and challenges at the beginning of the partnership

There was widespread consensus that the partnership came together without significant problems or barriers. Travis explains that 'the relationship from the beginning was fluid and natural: there were no real major difficulties.'
A challenge noted for Save the Children was establishing a relationship of trust with the local community. Nancy highlighted that:

> *'Although Travis and I were from here, and some members knew our families… it still took families up to 18 months to fully trust us in the set up of the Playscheme.'*

Tania also acknowledged this initial barrier. She commented that:

'It takes a lot of time to build the trust. It was a bit of concern at the beginning – the fact that there were so few there – 3 would turn up for the Playscheme.

One of the central factors that allayed this challenge was the support provided by Larrakia in educating Save the Children about the local community and helping Save the Children manage its expectations and maintain morale. Tania explained that:

'This was an important role that Larrakia played in the beginning: skilling up Save the Children about the area and the community and helping them to manage expectations and maintain morale. Reinforcing that people will come, in time. Talking them through it and helping them to have faith… I reinforced that that was ok… people were watching them and seeing how they would react. You just need to be there, continue to build it up, and watch. Things will change.'

There were also some minor logistical problems concerning office space. Tania explained that:

'Barriers at the beginning were only around office space issues - logistical stuff. Larrakia moved twice during that time. There might have been some issues there with office space and communications and respecting how we work together….moves like that always add stress. Some tension was there. People were mature enough to work through it.'

4. Partnership objectives

Both members of the partnership are well placed to assist the other to fulfil its objectives. As an outside organisation coming into an Aboriginal community, one of Save the Children's objectives with respect to the Playscheme project was to collaborate with local Elders and Aboriginal organisations who know the community well and who can help Save the Children communicate and engage with the community effectively. Travis explained that:

'Save didn't want to come in as outsiders. This was particularly as all the work was to be with Aboriginal communities. They really wanted input from local communities: wanted it to be based on relationships with them….It is about getting a consensus on what the communities want. Not asking around until you hear the message you want to hear. The community need to be involved from conception.'

As representatives of traditional Elders, Larrakia was in a position to help Save the Children achieve this objective. On the other hand, Save the Children was well placed to help Larrakia achieve objectives of its own. Kelvin highlighted that Larrakia was trying to establish itself with governments at the time it entered the partnership, including Northern Territory government departments and the federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). He asserted that Larrakia's relationship with Save the Children came at

an opportune time and provided Larrakia with 'good experience and connections' for government engagement. The partnership with Save the Children and the joint project also allowed Larrakia to meet its objectives of providing training and full employment to Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants in the local community and encouraging the provision of children's services in the town camps.

There are also several *common* objectives underlying the Save the Children - Larrakia partnership. Both partners are committed to creating an effective and culturally appropriate Playscheme program for disadvantaged and marginalised children and families in Darwin's town camps and to promote the participation of children and their families within the Playscheme. The partners seek to improve children and families' access to available services and resources and to develop and share knowledge, skills, and resources for their benefit. Both partners also have a strong incentive to engage the local community and it's Elders in the delivery of the project and to employ members of the local community to work in the Playscheme. By doing this, the partners aim to ensure the provision of a culturally appropriate service and to enhance the employment options and quality of life of the local community.

Lisa formally translated the agreement between the parties into a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which, according to Kelvin, is a very flexible document that accommodates and reflects the flexibility of the partnership. However, no copy of the MOU still exists and some of the interviewees had never seen it. This suggests that the MOU has not played a significant role in the partnership. Ilana reinforced this by stating:

> *'The partnership has not counted on formal documents - it has been much more based on relationships.'*

5. Ongoing partnership management

5.1 Relationship development

The relationship between the partners is characterised by collaboration, support, and understanding of each other's needs. According to Nancy, the partners are always there to offer support and assistance to each other when it is needed. Travis shared some examples of how this supportive relationship operates in respect to service delivery, explaining that:

> *'There have been service grants that we haven't applied for because they wanted to apply as well, so that there is not conflict within the partnership and we are not duplicating. We work together, we complement each other with our programs. For example, they do night patrols and through this they can send referrals to feed into our family support work. They have targeted family support services. Our family workers can refer families to them as that is not a service that we provide.'*

The relationships at the managerial level have also been close, supportive, and

collaborative. Tania explains that:

> *'The management developed really close relationships. Kelvin had certain issues that he consulted Lisa on… Kelvin was really good like this…Lisa was the same coming in. They worked together a lot, they had a good relationship.'*

However, there have been some changes in the working relationship of the partners over time. This shift may have arisen by virtue of changes in leadership, Save the Children no longer being collocated within Larrakia and internal growth issues in Larrakia, which expanded from around 20 to 80 staff over the period. According to Travis, these changes mean that priorities have shifted and 'the partnership has less focus'. With regard to the implications of the change of leadership in Larrakia, he explained that:

> *'Kelvin had a vision for Larrakia to have a children and families area focus. Over time he left and things shifted to the justice system and youth and homelessness in Larrakia Nation. So there is not a great deal of family and children's stuff. However we still maintain partnerships with Larrakia.'*

Ilana emphasised that, while the partnership 'used to be financially based, with mutual mentoring, general assistance, and a kind of unified attitudinal synergy about what we wanted to do', it is now more of a strong relationship than a formal business partnership. She asserted that:

> *'It is really a nominal, in name only, partnership at the moment. We certainly assist each other and are in contact but there is no formal shared business.'*

5.2 Communication

The communication between the partners, which has been regular, fluid, and informal, has been a major strength of the partnership. Tania explained that:

> *'Regular informal chats were the main points of communication. Real casual stuff. When things arise, you talk… Because their workers felt so comfortable within the organisation, staff would come up and say I have concerns about this, this needs to change. This is very rare in this kind of organisation. And that was cultivated. The benefits are obvious. It was responsive, it was solid.'*

Not surprisingly given the closeness of Kelvin and Lisa's relationship, there was also strong communication at the managerial level. Kelvin commented that:

> *' It was day to day interaction with Lisa and her team. My office was just across from the team's. Regular contact and visits from Lisa were also critical… Lisa ensured that any issues that arose were redressed in a really frank way.'*

5.3 Dispute resolution

Kelvin also highlighted that the partners took a frank, positive, and proactive approach to disputes and situations where particular participants in the Playscheme

were not suitable for their positions. He explained that:

> *'I tried to ensure that people understand that while it is important that they are happy, they also have to give back - there needs to be some core productivity. Lisa was the same: it was about getting the right people on board. There were a couple of people who expressed some interest in working with children, but in the end who couldn't deliver. This had to be dealt with, and was done so in a positive way.'*

5.4 Flexibility of the partnership to changing needs and opportunities

Although the parties initially negotiated the key aspects of the program and the partnership, there appears to be a mutual understanding that the partnership is flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances and priorities of the partners. Kelvin explained that:

> *'We negotiated the key points of the program and overall partnership when Lisa Hillan was up, and with Nancy as well in an ongoing manner. But we were not sticking to detail. It was a relationship that was built on trust and respect, it was not about legally binding contracts and outcomes. So it was reasonably flexible, as opposed to too loose.'*

Ilana also acknowledged the flexibility of the partnership, commenting that the partnership can be renegotiated 'where new needs are identified or opportunities arise' and that '*...we would be both open to joint projects in the future or a strengthening partners approach to* respond to specific issues or the realities of the time.'

During the years in which the partnership has been in place, Larrakia has expanded significantly and required to shift attention to its internal development and implementation of other priority programs, which has seen the partnership become less of a focus. Save the Children has responded flexibly to these changes in the nature of the partnership and has offered mentoring and support to Larrakia workers. Nancy explained that:

> *'A lot of mentoring and support for Larrakia workers has taken place. That level of support is also reflected in the number of staff that have come over to Save. Larrakia went through some difficult times, so things backed off with the partnership, but we would provide supervision, guidance, support to the staff. We saw the need for support and just assumed the role.'*

6. Monitoring and evaluation

While Travis acknowledged that monitoring and evaluation of the partnership would be 'a really good idea,' both he and Kelvin stated that no formal monitoring or evaluation has taken place. Kelvin offered time-restraints as one explanation for the lack of focus on evaluation, explaining that he was 'too busy to focus on reviews and significant project development.'

However, both Travis and Kelvin also felt that monitoring has not been necessary due to the blatant benefits and positive outcomes of the joint project and the positive feedback that Kelvin has received from the community and Elders, who have affirmed that the program is effective and is working well. Kelvin stated: *"I was confident that services were being provided that were benefiting the community. That was enough for us."*

Ilana also commented on the manifest success of the project, stating:

> *'When I came on board, the Playscheme had been in place for a number of years and was working really well. There was a great response from the community and it was obviously a valuable project. It still is a great project for urban Aboriginal people.'*

7. Focus on capacity development

7.1 Professional development and workforce

According to Tania, Save the Children recognised that capacity building was important in developing a sustainable workforce. She said:

> *'I am not sure whether that was a stipulation from Larrakia… but it was quickly assumed that this was needed, and it certainly provided great assistance.'*

Before the commencement of the Playscheme project, the three Save the Children Playscheme staff underwent significant training to acquire the confidence, knowledge, cultural awareness and skills they needed to effectively implement the program in the Larrakia community.

Larrakia staff have also benefited greatly from the capacity building conducted through the partnership. As highlighted by Tania, the Larrakia Playscheme staff have been empowered by new knowledge and skills. Tania explained that:

> *'The program is still growing, they have a strong workforce and a number of vans going to a broader area. You have Indigenous people who are still there from the start. This is also rare. This means that they have been made to feel very valued in the organisation and they have been trained properly. They have been supported. They are feeding into program design and delivery. The Larrakia staff working in the Playscheme are very happy and very empowered now about children's and family's issues, about children's rights.'*

Ilana also commented on the benefits of the training Lisa has provided for Larrakia staff. She explained that:

> *'Lisa, who is a highly skilled practitioner in this area of social work for kids and families, did counselling training and brief intervention training for our staff. This, during a period in which we were drastically underfunded as well as just in the lead up to the NT intervention which led to a massive influx of people into Darwin, was really useful.'*

This collaboration had broad implications, as Ilana recounted:

> *'I worked closely with Lisa Hillan on deepening the partnership in a sense where we actually shared some training outcomes and also started to work on closer collaboration between projects. … It assisted in the early days a greater deepening of the projects and the services that we provide to Aboriginal communities in the area. It was quite useful to do shared collaborative training particularly having a standard approach towards the case management practices in both Larrakia and Save the Children staff.'*

Save the Children also provided valuable guidance and assistance to Nancy, which, according to Kelvin, was an important gift to both the partnership and the local community. Kelvin asserted that:

> *'The support, guidance and assistance that Save the Children and particularly Lisa gave to Nancy is an absolute credit. I see Nancy becoming a significant Indigenous women leader. She comes with great credibility because of the support and guidance that Save the Children provided. That reflects through her team. That is great. Some of the challenges that this community has seen in the past is domination of males and male egos. So this was an important development.'*

According to Nancy, while capacity development within the partnership is ongoing, it now takes the form of each partner inviting the other to attend its internal training programs. In this way, staff within both organisations have enhanced opportunities for professional development and the partners benefit from shared learning. Nancy commented that:

> *'There is no structured way that this training or mutual support happens. It just morphs. It is at more of a respect level. If we have got funding to do it then why not bring more of our Aboriginal workers in to be skilled up.'*

Ilana also explains that capacity building has occurred through the crossover of staff between the two organisations. She explained that:

> *'Personnel would cross over, work for us for a while then cross over to Save and then maybe back again. This still occurs. We are all pretty close, it is a close-knit community. Darwin has dramatically matured over the last few years, although there is still a long way to go, in terms of the NGO sector getting much more professional and better resourced. This process has contributed to this.'*

7.2 Funding and resourcing

Save the Children initially paid Larrakia an amount to set up their office within Larrakia Nation. With regards to staffing, three people were employed by Larrakia to work on the Playscheme through CDEP. These wages were topped up by Save the Children. Nancy was directly engaged by Save the Children.

The partners have also provided each other with assistance in applications for funding and grants. Nancy explained that Save the Children assisted Larrakia in writing a submission to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for funding to operate a targeted family support service within the Department. Nancy explained that:

> *'We assisted in writing the submission, including Save as the child protection experts in the field to support their staff through the process with DCF. Things changed with management however, so this didn't go ahead. However, they did get the offer and have set up the service.'*

Ilana also mentioned that Larrakia assisted Save the Children in its bid to get funding for a ground breaking project to improve education outcomes in the local community, for which Larrakia's local community connection was critical.

8. Cultural competency

Cultural competency and appropriateness were recognised by both partners as being imperative in their own right and also vital to the success of the Playscheme project in the Larrakia Nation. Particular emphasis was placed on the employment of Indigenous staff to operate the Playscheme. Tania explained that:

> *'The people that Lisa got working were Larrakia people. So this was rooted in the partnership. That was a lot of what it was about from Larrakia side – employing and supporting Larakia people.'*

Travis and Nancy recognised the importance of this aspect of the project, commenting that:

> *'If we hadn't have had an NT staff that was indigenous, it would not have happened. 98per cent Aboriginal staff. This was a major factor. It brought cultural understanding and basic trust.'*

Ilana also elaborated on this point, explaining that:

> *'Developments in cultural competency have been pretty mutual. Most of Save is local staff and Save has always had a very strong philosophy of working with local people in a cultural sense in the communities where they are operating, and that is really important… With local staff, you have life long relationships between people like Nancy Sweeney and our staff: that is forever stuff… So utilising local staff in management roles is a really good thing and works well for everybody.'*

9. Partnership outcomes

The partnership and the Playscheme project have yielded a number of positive outcomes for both the partners and the local community.

9.1 Increased advocacy and lobbying power for Larrakia

One outcome of the partnership has been an increase the lobbying and advocacy power wielded by Larrakia through its association with Save the Children. Ilana asserted that:

> *'Save the Children have been really helpful in the past with Lisa Hillan's position on national bodies to advocate on issues. It was good for us to have a conduit where we could get our intelligence of what was happening on the ground into policy debate. That was pretty useful. We saw issues getting voiced.'*

Ilana asserted that this increase in government engagement has led to reform in the community service sphere. More specifically, she asserted that:

> *'…the combined work that we have done together, with the focused lobbying and representation to government, has led to great reform to both have family support workers acknowledged as a critical element in the service sphere as well as to engage the NGO sector in better outcomes for families, recognising that we do it best, better than government can…we have been the front runners in achieving this.'*

Kelvin also commented on this particular outcome of the partnership, and highlighted the benefits of increased advocacy and lobbying power for the Indigenous community. He stated that:

> *'I am sure there is a level of evidence that Save the Children have tried to wave under the noses of government and inform them of issues and demand attention, which is something much needed. The more support you can give to Indigenous mothers the better the quality of life for their children and grand children. There are absolute tragedies in the town camps because the governments do not resource the critical issues. Everything that Government has been concerned with through the NTER also happen in the town camps. Save the Children assist in providing a voice to these issues.'*

> 9.2 An Increase in the Integrity and Awareness of Save the Children in the Community

Both Ilana and Travis also highlighted that the partnership has also been highly advantageous for Save the Children in terms of increasing community awareness of Save the Children and its work, and allowing Save the Children to gain the trust, respect and support of the local community. Ilana highlighted that:

> *' … The partnership has been useful for Save the Children to give them authority to work with Aboriginal communities and do what they do and in relation to referrals. Mothers identify issues at the Playscheme, and then they can refer them and follow up. This has had an impact.'*

Travis also commented on these particular benefits that have been conferred upon Save the Children, asserting that:

'The partnership provided Save with legitimacy and a channel for awareness of Save through the community. It may not have succeeded without the partnership, and may have fallen off its wheels. This was a critical aspect for its success. Larrakia were the traditional owners, they were respected, and support by them, and them spreading the word gave us our base.'

9.3 Enhanced opportunities for Larrakia to expand its services

Kelvin also recognised that the partnership has increased the integrity of Larrakia as a provider of services for children and families in the community and thus has provided Larrakia with opportunities to expand their services. He explained that:

'Delivery of that Playgroup program was important for Larrakia Nation to provide other services and coordination activities. For example, in the period following the set up of the Playgroup, we were providing community training on various skill building activities and art workshops. Save the Children providing the Playgroup enabled an opportunity over time for the community to accept other services from Larrakia Nation. It provided authority, and good faith for the area.'

Ilana also acknowledged that the training and capacity building provided by Save the Children has given Larrakia the expertise and confidence to take on new services, such as the targeted family service. After describing the counselling and brief intervention training that Lisa provided for Larrakia staff, Ilana commented that:

'And I guess that led us into feeling confident to take on the targeted family service, which is still in early stages. It is quite a complex program that has required a lot of negotiation between us and government.'

9.4 Ongoing mutual support and a common voice

Ilana also highlighted that another outcome of the partnership is the ongoing mutual support and the common voice that the partners offer each other as likeminded organisations working to achieve common objectives in a difficult political climate. Ilana commented that:

'We have been collaborating and are ideologically very close when it comes, for example, to having a peak body set up that is grassroots rather than top- heavy departmental. There is still a lot of value derived from these long-term relationships in this kind of way – providing mutual support and a common voice for issues in the sector.'

9.5 Outcomes for the local community

The Playscheme project has also yielded a range of positive outcomes for the local community. These include enhanced employment options for members of the local community, some of whom have received training and employment within Save the Children. There are also higher levels of school attendance amongst those children in the community who have gone through the Playscheme program. Thirdly, the

Playscheme appears to have contributed to a general increase in the quality of life of people living in the town camps. With respect to the latter outcome, Kelvin commented that:

> *'Larrakia started to offer significant programs for communities that were really needed and appreciated, including the Save the Children program. These all started to make a difference in the life of people in town camps, the quality of life. They saw that. These programs didn't exist in the camps before this.'*

10. Further opportunities

According to Ilana, another future opportunity arising from the partnership is the possibility of Save the Children 'managing the children's program funded by FaHCSIA for a couple more years and then transferring it over to [Larrakia].' However, Ilana emphasised that this was only an idea at this stage and may not eventuate. She stated that:

> *'That is a theory at the moment and whether it goes ahead depends on a lot of factors, including how this organisation evolves over the next couple of years and whether we have capacity to have that project. There is an ideology to work out as well. Their project is based on punitive income management approach to child protection – which we don't support. That is a government issue and I fully understand why Save the Children have taken it on. It is at least a way to interact with and engage with families, even with the big stick over you. But we have also got really difficult political ambience between the territory government and federal government on communicating about those projects.'*

Ilana also shared that at this stage that it remains a question of having practical partnership focused discussions about priorities and possibilities for both organisations. As Ilana explained:

> *'I do think that the partnership is now at a theoretical stage, rather than practical. For example, Nancy has said we are going to get the family support program up and running and then pass it over to Larrakia. We in Larrakia don't know however whether we will have the capacity or the desire to manage 20 additional staff and a client list in the 1000s. So a practical partnership discussion where we are willing participants in working towards a mutually beneficial outcome needs to occur.*
>
> *But in the meantime, friendships, historical successes, likeminded approach, respect and goodwill between us is priceless, and a great example of how an international NGO can work with mutual benefit as equal with the locals.'*

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

APPENDIX B
SUMMARY PARTNERSHIP CASE STUDIES

Contents

Partnership Case Study 1

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and UnitingCare Gippsland (UCG)

The partnership

GEGAC and UCG have a long-standing relationship that began in the 1970s and has developed over time through activities including cultural awareness education, governance training, staff secondments, partnerships on particular programs, and education and training of staff. In recent years the partnership between GEGAC and UCG in the development and delivery of early years services has strengthened through significant joint initiatives. In 2004 UCG was appointed as the facilitating partner for the FaHCSIA funded Communities for Children, a place-based community development program that focuses on the early years services. An increase in funding from state and federal government for early years services three and a half years ago found GEGAC with the opportunity to focus more on the early years, but lacking the capacity to respond to this opportunity. At the same time UCG had to face funding constraints and was under threat of losing a very experienced worker. Consequently, the two organisations made the decision to enter into a partnership through which GEGAC could benefit from the early years expertise of UCG and UCG could retain this staff member by employing her in the role of Indigenous Early Years Coordinator, working across both organisations.

Currently GEGAC and UCG work together in a partnership agreement that encompasses the shared role of the Indigenous Early Years Coordinator, a shared family services reception and early years assistant role, the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre and the FaHCSIA funded Indigenous Parenting Support Service delivered through the Boorai Supported Playgroup. They also collaborate at the broader strategic level as members of the East Gippsland Early Years Committee and have been at the table together for planning around programs such as Best Start and Healthy for Life.

Objectives of working in partnership

The partnership agreement between GEGAC and UCG describes the shared commitment '*to Aboriginal self-determination and the priority of ensuring services are developed and implemented in culturally acceptable ways*.'

Processes of goal setting between GEGAC and UCG in relation to their partnership work are shared and largely informal. While specific programmatic goals are more formalised, partnership goals are often negotiated in the context of responding to the needs that present.

Alyson Ferguson, Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services at GEGAC, identifies the following objectives that underpin partnership work with UCG:

- A key initial objective is to ensure that programs are rolled out to meet community needs.

- The partnership is also about '*survival*' under the pressure to role out government-funded programs.

Kim McAlister, Director of Early Years Practice at UCG, identifies the following objectives that underpin partnership work with GEGAG:

- The key objective in the partnership for UCG is building capacity for GEGAC and for the Aboriginal community.
- Self-determination is a key principle underpinning the partnership.
- The partnership has been established to help remove barriers so that Aboriginal children and families can actively participate and have improved choices that lead to good health, education and connections.

Partnership negotiations and agreements

The current formal agreements between GEGAC and UCG are structured in terms of an overarching partnership agreement and four individual memoranda of understanding relating to specific partnership activities identified in the '*partnership action areas*' section of the agreement.

Partnership negotiations between GEGAC and UCG are based on relationships and conversations at all levels. It is the needs and the relationships that ultimately inform the agreements, rather than the agreements driving the relationship. The partners recognise that formal agreements should not restrain the flexibility of day-to-day working arrangements. They are considered valuable to reflect the commitment to working together and ensure that work can continue even if there is a changeover of staff. The importance of good communication about agreements within each organisation is highlighted because it ensures that partnership negotiations at different levels are well informed and do not encounter difficulties. Reflecting on the strength of the relationship between the organisations, GEGAC and UCG express confidence that any challenges in the process of negotiation can be overcome. Negotiations are generally straightforward because relationships are open and honest and the organisations are working together to achieve the shared goal, to address disadvantages and to improve outcomes for children and families.

Practices – Ongoing partnership management

UCG and GEGAC identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Open and honest communication:

- Most communications are informal, immediate and direct.
- Immediate and direct conflict resolution: If there is a '*misunderstanding or something uncomfortable*' staff will talk about it face to face as soon as they have the opportunity.
- Leaders are attentive to relationships ensuring that *'everybody is okay'* and issues are dealt with.

Shared planning processes:

- ❖ Significant shared planning activities take place especially through the Early Years Committee, in relations to specific programs and in relation to the development of the Children and Family Centre;
- ❖ There are regular meetings between Alyson and Kim in regards to:
    - o formal meetings that happen at the broader strategic level in multi-partner forums such as the Early Years Committee;
    - o meetings focussed around specific partnership activities such as review of shared staffing arrangements or developing position descriptions;
    - o meetings for the development of the Children and Family Centre.
- ❖ CEOs meet regularly and are attentive to the partnership relationship and the strategic direction of the organisations working in partnership.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- ❖ There is shared development of evaluation frameworks for all shared projects of GEGAC and UCG.
- ❖ UCG provide evaluation support to GEGAC through inviting staff to evaluation trainings.
- ❖ A lot of evaluation is related to the push for acquittal and accountability to funding bodies.
- ❖ A review of the partnership itself takes place on an annual basis but does not involve a highly formalised evaluation process and focuses more on the current needs and what has to happen next.

Capacity building

A significant partnership goal is developing shared capacity. Neither agency would want to say no to any of the resources on offer from government. If they work together they have the opportunity to '*strengthen the delivery of those resources in a way that will have better outcomes for the communities*.' UCG supports capacity development of GEGAC according to the needs identified by the organisations in partnership. Where UCG holds the necessary resources, staff, knowledge or expertise, the two organisations negotiate how that can be shared or transferred. The role of UCG is to facilitate and support Aboriginal community and organisational governance structures, rather than to take a governance role. UCG believes it is imperative that governance of services for Aboriginal families is '*community owned and controlled*'. UCG provides support for developing processes such as risk analysis and structures of accountability.

A recent example of capacity development has been the identification of a high need for GEGAC for facilitation and administration support around the development of the Children and Family Centre. As GEGAC were lacking staff capacity for this role, UCG has provided a staff member with the needed skills, while GEGAC is funding the position. It is intended that this will fill a short-term capacity gap and GEGAC will employ their own staff for the position in the future. The strategy for establishing the Centre includes a three-year plan for UCG to work alongside GEGAC in the development and delivery of the service while supporting capacity to transition the service to operation by GEGAC in that timeframe. As Kim describes:

'We use the words 'walk alongside' and we choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do…the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to GEGAC when they're ready for that.'

Cultural competency

UCG demonstrates a clear commitment to Aboriginal community engagement and partnership not only in its engagement practice, but also through evaluation of community engagement and a willingness to share learning. The agency has a Reconciliation Action Plan that describes their commitment to '*working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a way that empowers and enables a respectful, two-way learning environment.*' UCG formally evaluates the overall engagement of the agency with Aboriginal communities. This has happened specifically through the 2008 Communities for Children evaluation and the 2011 Walking Together Project evaluation. A key partnership evaluation learning expressed by UCG has been that, '*Partnerships are essential, but can be about power, and you need to promote partnerships of equality through respect, communication and understanding.*' Aboriginal cultural training forms an important part of induction processes for UCG staff and UCG expresses a clear commitment to self-determination. This commitment raises the question of whether and to what extent UCG, as a mainstream agency, should be involved in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. UCG provide a useful description of their perspective on this role:

'It could be argued that local Aboriginal organisations should do this work, but a couple of realities must be acknowledged - 1) not all community members/leaders will work with local Aboriginal organisations and 2) expectations on Aboriginal organisations to manage multiple programs from State and Federal government has resulted in overload due to issues around capacity to manage a large breadth of programs and respond to high community needs. This project is working closely with local Aboriginal organisations and their key community leaders/workers and provides support to initiatives they are undertaking.'

With GEGAC in particular, there are various learning and mentoring opportunities:

- GEGAC's Keeping Place provides a cultural learning place for new UCG staff.
- Shared staff members are extremely valuable for sharing about culture and ways of working that filters through at the staff level and improves everyone's practice with Aboriginal families.
- The shared staff member functions as an advocate for families and the community with both organisations.
- Further opportunities exist to improve cultural learning together if capacity issues can be overcome.

Significant challenges

Significant challenges identified by UCG and GEGAC in the partnership include:

- ❖ Capacity and funding issues limit the activities that the organisations can do together and the time available for partnership work.
- ❖ Significant expectations from government and high community need in the context of capacity constraints.
- ❖ Short-term and project-based government funding that limits the focus on long-term outcomes. Funding needs to be *'pooled and flexible'* to enable better outcomes.

Outcomes and opportunities

Alyson describes the early years collaboration through the shared staff member as the most critical partnership enabling the development of GEGAC early years services. Kim comments, *'I don't think I've seen a truer integration anywhere of staff fluidly working between the organisations.'*

'You can put a program in and roll it out, that's really simple, but to make it effectively work and make it sustainable is not that easy. That's where it was really good to have the shared worker come on board and make sure the programs were sustainable, effective and worked for community.'

Alyson Ferguson, Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services, GEGAC

The shared worker arrangement is a critical link between the organisations that has improved access to services for Aboriginal families. Community members are more likely to access UCG services because, *'Community members that don't want to come to GEGAC, and there are community members who don't want to use an ACCO, will know that she also works at UCG and will see her over there.'*

Kim McAlister, Director of Early Years Practice, UCG

Families are comfortable accessing the community kindergarten because they wouldn't know it was owned and operated by UCG. What they see is the two organisations working together: *'Now we've got nearly 100 per cent attendance at kindy. Three or four years ago that wasn't the case and that's one of the reasons why the community kindergarten was established. We now have a waiting list.'*

Alyson Ferguson, Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services, GEGAC

When asked to comment on the contribution of the partnership to GEGAC's overall capacity, Alyson explained, *'It's immeasurable. In all honesty, if we didn't have a partnership we wouldn't have the programs operating as well as they are. You can't measure the impact of that, it's just been critical.'*

Partnership Case Study 2

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and Gippsland Lakes Community Health (GLCH)

The partnership

GEGAC and GLCH have worked together over a number of years on various committees, but began to work more significantly in partnership in recent years, beginning with a joint Family Violence submission in 2006. The work of GEGAC and GLCH in Family Violence Services grew out of a partnership approach and currently GEGAC manage the shelter and Aboriginal family violence outreach while GLCH manage the mainstream family violence outreach. There is an agreement between the organisations under which any L17 Family Violence referrals that come from the police to GLCH and relate to an Aboriginal person are referred directly on to GEGAC who make the first contact with the family.

GEGAC and GLCH have worked most closely together in relation to the delivery of the Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) service, for which GLCH is the lead agency. There was a need to ensure that families had a choice of services and that the initial assessments were culturally appropriate. Accordingly, people are given a choice initially to work with GEGAC or with the mainstream service. Where Aboriginal people choose to work with mainstream, GEGAC supports to ensure the initial assessment is culturally appropriate.

More recently GEGAC and GLCH have also worked together in relation to the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre and have a separate multi-partner MoU in relation to this, together with UnitingCare Gippsland and East Gippsland Shire Council.

Objectives for working in partnership

The key objective in entering a partnership around Child FIRST from GEGAC's perspective was '*to make sure community still had a choice and that the services provided were culturally appropriate*.' As there are members of the community that wouldn't want to use a mainstream service, Ailsa Carr, Executive Manager for Family, Youth and Children's Services at GLCH, explains that it is necessary and important '*to work together around being able to provide the best service to those clients*.' The openness of both organisations to work together and move outside individual silos is therefore crucial to enabling the partnership. Both organisations have the shared goal to ensure all families can access support and children are safe. GLCH recognises that they have a role to support GEGAC in responding to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and families in the child protection sector. Other key objectives of the partnership work are shared learning and developing new ways of working, as Ailsa notes:

'There are always different ways of doing things and different ways of approaching things and I think the more open you are to looking at how things can be done differently then the better the services that you're going to be able to provide.'

Negotiation and agreements

The two most significant partnership documents that have been negotiated between GEGAC and GLCH have been the Family Violence submission and the Child FIRST MoU. The representatives of both organisations indicate that there were no significant issues in negotiating and developing these agreements. The long-standing working relationship between them made it possible to have honest and open negotiations that were relatively easy. Alyson Ferguson, the Manager of Children, Youth and Family Services at GEGAC, explains that negotiation within the East Gippsland Family Violence Committee has been important to achieving positive change in the partnership with input from various stakeholders.

Practices – Working together

GEGAC and GLCH identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Open communication

- Honest and open communication and negotiations as a result of a long-standing working relationship.
- Regular conversations to discuss issues that arise. Support and mediation are provided where there are challenges or disputes between staff.

Shared work and staff interaction

- Regular meetings, staff contact and communication through:
  - case conferencing
  - maternal and child health nursing clinics run by GLCH at GEGAC
  - GLCH disability staff working at GEGAC

Planning

- Participation in multi-partner forums and structures provides platforms for partnership communication and planning, including:
  - Child and Family Service Alliance meetings
  - the East Gippsland Family Violence Steering Committee
  - the partnership for development of the Bairnsdale Children and Family Centre
- Taking advantage of existing structures to support partnership work rather than trying to create new ones that increase workloads and pressure.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- Child FIRST work is evaluated through the Child and Family Services Alliance.
- There is evaluation of the partnership work in the formal meetings but no evaluation processes focused on the partnership relationship. Informal review and ongoing discussion around partnership activities lead to changes in how GLCH and GEGAC work together.

- ❖ Processes around evaluating the cultural competency of GLCH will be built into the Cultural Awareness Framework that GLCH is currently developing.

Capacity building

In relation to the Child FIRST Alliance, the partnership between GLCH and GEGAC has enabled a small amount of additional funding support for GEGAC's intake and assessment role. However, this has not had a large impact on how GEGAC does business.

Cultural competency

Activities and ways of working that reflect the level of cultural competency of GLCH as an organisation include:

- ❖ supporting and attending community events;
- ❖ acknowledging sorry time;
- ❖ acknowledging the Aboriginal community as a whole and GEGAC's role as an integral part of that community; as '*the lead agency in the area*';
- ❖ displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags;
- ❖ forming a committee focused on organisational cultural competence ('Cultural Awareness Framework Project')

The organisation also uses the DHS cultural competence framework, which connects to the CSO registration standards for Child FIRST.

In term of the contribution of GEGAC to cultural competency development in GLCH, Ailsa describes that '*we get probably as much from GEGAC as they get from us*.' Ways in which this happens include:

- ❖ cultural sharing from GEGAC held at the Keeping Place;
- ❖ informal learning through interaction between staff when services are provided in partnership;
- ❖ cultural advice from GEGAC in relation to specific clients.

Alyson identifies that GLCH has '*a way to go in developing culturally appropriate services.*' Challenges, from her perspective, have included that GLCH has not effectively made contact with Aboriginal women who are the subject of L17 family violence referrals and also a lack of value for the cultural knowledge and skills of GEGAC staff. Alyson believes there is an opportunity for GEGAC to have a greater role in training and support for GLCH staff to work in culturally appropriate ways with Aboriginal people.

GLCH are currently engaged in a project to develop an organisational 'Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Framework' which aims '*to develop a set of policies that detail how GLCH will work effectively with the Aboriginal community*.' The policy areas under development include:

- cultural awareness training;
- creating a welcome, safe and accessible environment;
- recruitment and employment;
- agency commitment to self-determination and acknowledgement;

- partnerships and;
- culturally responsive service delivery.

This process has been established to ensure that the organisation develops cultural competence in a strategic and coordinated way.

Significant challenges

Significant challenges identified by GLCH and GEGAC in the partnership include:

- ❖ The Child FIRST MoU is '*all good in theory*' but has not been working well in practice. Alyson notes that GLCH has not involved GEGAC significantly in client work.
- ❖ Finding time for partnership work is challenging, as Ailsa explains: '*Achieving things in partnership takes time. To make partnerships work you have to be able to meet and talk things over. It's a challenge to find the time for those meetings.'*
- ❖ High expectations on GEGAC from Government to develop and deliver services for the Aboriginal community without adequate funding and resources limits their capacity to focus on the partnership development.
- ❖ The different ways of working of both organisations impact areas such as:
    - sharing of information: the GLCH approach to privacy of information for clients makes it difficult for GEGAC to work with families with insufficient information;
    - case-management model: GEGAC always adopts an individual case management approach, whereas GLCH may have a large number of different programs working with one family.;
    - outcomes focus: Alyson describes that GLCH are '*data driven'* while GEGAC are not driven by targets, but by '*what the family needs to survive.*' Ailsa describes that there is a strong focus on well-being outcomes for all clients of GLCH that is not limited by a data focus and there is a need to work with GEGAC to unpack differences in understanding of evaluation approaches.

Outcomes and opportunities

According to Ailsa, the increase in employment of Aboriginal people at GLCH is a significant outcome of their partnership work with a number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. This has been a move from having no Aboriginal employees to nine per cent, which is not large, but has been a proactive move to support employment which brings a richness to the organisation.

Alyson affirms the importance of the recent shift in process for dealing with L17 referrals as a positive partnership outcome. Previously, in the case of L17 Family Violence referrals, GLCH would make the first contact in response to all referrals. Through the input from GEGAC, community, the police and other stakeholders it was decided that this was not '*the most culturally appropriate way to respond to something as difficult as family violence*.' As a result, referrals where the victim is identified as Aboriginal will be passed directly to GEGAC.

Ailsa believes that there has been, '*increased access for the community to a whole range of services, whether they're provided by GEGAC or ourselves*.' She provided the example of the Early Childhood Intervention disability service that had no Aboriginal children enrolled and now has fifty per cent Aboriginal enrolment. This came out of work done in conjunction with GEGAC's Boorai playgroup.

Alyson notes the significant opportunity that exists, especially with the change in the L17 referral process, for strengthening how GEGAC and GLCH work in relation to the MoU, '*to try and really get that bedded down in practice*.'

Partnership Case Study 3

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Partnership Case Study 4

Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA) and Save the Children

The partnership

The Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA) started as a community initiative for young mothers and babies at the recreation centre in Wyndham. The mums felt that mainstream services weren't meeting their needs and were meeting regularly using whatever resources they could to build capacity for themselves and their children. Save the Children became involved in 2005 through the Government program, Communities for Children. Save the Children partnered with Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation in Wyndham to fund and support the development of WELA. Since this time WELA has evolved from a playgroup to an incorporated and independent broader service with activities including: focused learning for children with their Mums, health and nutrition support, transition to school support, a breakfast club, a women's centre and, men's groups.

Principles for working in partnership

Save the Children identifies key principles that underpin partnership work with WELA:

- It is not about the image or growth of Save the Children, it is about support for WELA to fulfill their objectives.
- Ideally we wouldn't be here in 20 or 50 years, so it is important for us to build capacity locally.
- It is taking their lead on it. The program was dictated by what they thought would work within the community.
- The partnership builds on the strengths of the young Mums group that was already operating.
- We suggest possibilities and they identify priorities. Through our actions we demonstrate what we can do for them.

WELA identifies key principles that underpin partnership work with Save the Children:

- Everything we do with Save the Children should be relevant to the community.
- The aim is to respond to what the community wants: WELA must have the flexibility to adapt programs to emerging community needs.
- The focus is providing the service and we do not want to become '*an office or a bureaucracy*'.
- WELA needs to grow in order to provide a holistic service to the community which addresses all the needs of children and families.
- Developing strong community leaders is key, including employment and training of local people and having a local board of management.
- Cultural awareness of Save the Children staff is critical to effective relationships.

Agreements

The relationship operates under a funding for service agreement, which is re-negotiated annually. The funding agreement changes based on the needs of the community and joint review of activities that have been conducted. There is no Memorandum of Understanding that reflects the way the partnership works.

Practices – Working together

WELA and Save the Children identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Building relationships

- being patient: having and giving time to establish relationships.
- employment of local Aboriginal staff by Save the Children.
- strong presence in the community: staff numbers and visiting regularly.
- strong mutual trust: WELA knows that Save the Children will be there if they are stuck.
- mutual respect: WELA describes: '*they see we have something to contribute; we are a central partner; we have a voice in decisions*'.
- part-time co-location of staff in the Wyndham office for a period facilitated relationship building and support.

Open and honest communication

- regular informal communication: phone calls, emails, visits.
- concerns and issues can be raised without being taken personally.
- no fear for WELA that funding will be withdrawn because of what is said.

Flexibility

- operational flexibility that enables decision making at the community level.
- agreements can be renegotiated in response to community needs.

Shared planning processes

- informal and open negotiation of funding agreement.
- activities planned in response to community and service needs.
- input and feedback from Save the Children on the WELA strategic plan.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- independent review of program by Curtin University every 6 months.
- discussion and planning for program based on review outcomes.
- monthly reports on program from WELA - relevant and not time consuming.
- no specific evaluation of the partnership relationship.

Capacity building

The partnership builds capacity for WELA in the following key areas:

Governance: Save the Children provides governance capacity support for WELA by

providing advice and assisting with: the process of incorporation; operating as an incorporated body; policy and procedure development; financial management; and data collection for monitoring and evaluation. Save the Children have connected WELA with corporate volunteers who support governance development.

Professional development and workforce: Save the Children makes recommendations and provides support in relation to identified training needs. They have assisted in providing early childhood education training opportunities for staff. Save the Children also provides professional development opportunities for the WELA Coordinator and there is a mutual, ongoing mentoring role between the WELA Coordinator and the Save the Children Program Coordinator.

Funding and resourcing: Funding from Save the Children is static and it is vital for WELA to identify other sources, which it has successfully done. Save the Children plays a key support and advocacy role for WELA in attracting new funding. Save the Children provides information about funding opportunities; assists planning for sustainable funding; lobbies with funding bodies; provides feedback on applications and; profiles WELA on their website.

Cultural competency

The cultural competency journey of Save the Children working with WELA and in East Kimberley has been a significant learning experience with many challenges. Aspects of this journey include:

- Save the Children planned to use community development expertise developed in South East Asia and implemented the same models, which didn't work.
- Early on, staff worked in ways the community considered culturally inappropriate. Partnerships were formed and cultural training done with Aboriginal organisations not from East Kimberley.
- The employment of local Aboriginal staff promoted a focus on cultural awareness for staff and changed relationships with the community.
- Save the Children had no formal framework for developing cultural competency. The development of a Reconciliation Action Plan has brought an organisational focus and ensured cultural awareness training for new staff.
- WELA believes that over time Save the Children have changed their approach, developed an appropriate team, built relationships and overcome cultural challenges.

Significant challenges

Significant challenges identified by Save the Children and WELA in the partnership include:

- one year funding agreements that limit long-term program planning.
- fitting service development to '*top down*' government funding requirements.

- ❖ different approaches to evaluation and different perspectives on how outcomes should be measured.
- ❖ significant structural change and growth required for WELA and adjusting to procedural and reporting requirements which they see as not always relevant.
- ❖ lack of cultural awareness of Save the Children staff and building common understanding.
- ❖ staff turnover at Save the Children who will be bringing on their fourth Program Coordinator since 2005 in January 2012. This has required WELA to re-establish relationships regularly.

Outcomes and opportunities

'There is a direct link between the partnership and new programs WELA are running. Save the Children supported them to grow and become incorporated and this has enabled them to be where they are today.'

Anthea Whan, Save the Children

'If Save the Children had not come in, there would not be the family engagement… there would not be WELA. They took a chance on a fledgling group. This has been a massive change for our sustainability and capacity for service outcomes.**'**

Jane Parker, Coordinator, WELA

'The kids in WELA are a step ahead of the rest. School becomes easy for them, their reading levels are high, their behaviour is good, they know what to do and they do it. They interact well with other kids. They are more independent. The kids share. They are more confident.'

Estelle Hunter, Chairperson, WELA

'I have only Aboriginal staff at the moment and that is because they are good. They are part of the success of WELA, their personal growth as community women. The building of their skills and confidence is enormous.'

Jane Parker, Coordinator, WELA

'In the future there will be times when we need them more and when we don't need them so much. The relationship is flexible enough to support that and to evolve with that.'

Jane Parker, Coordinator, WELA

Partnership Case Study 5

Dalaigur Pre-School and Children's Services

The partnerships

Dalaigur Pre-School and Children's Services is a 3-unit independent Aboriginal owned community pre-school which serves the community of Kempsey and outlying areas of Kempsey Shire. The pre-school currently enrols 110 children, including 104 Aboriginal children. It has been operating for over 45 years and has been self-managed since 1991. Dalaigur highlights its independence, and is not affiliated to a particular Aboriginal clan. It has an Aboriginal community board and employs predominantly Aboriginal staff.

The pre-school is strong in partnerships and regularly seeks to build and promote the service in partnership with other organisations and the local community. Available program funding is often key in the initiation of these partnerships. Dalaigur engages in partnership work with:

- the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) as a pilot site for the implementation of the Early Childhood Language and Literacy Project.
- NAPCAN for the implementation of the All Children Being Safe (ACBF) program as a tool for developing protective behaviours for children.
- the Kids Matter Early Childhood Initiative to plan and implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies.
- Early intervention services to support children with disabilities and their families.
- Gunawirra foundation to conduct camps, which support families of children with disabilities.
- The Kempsey primary school to support transition to school and to conduct leadership programs, sports days and literacy programs that are empowering for the primary school and pre-school children.
- Various community boards and committees for local planning and to ensure an Aboriginal perspective in decision-making.

Partnership examples:

ALNF:
Dalaigur identified that children were missing out because there was no speech therapist working at the school. ALNF had received funding through DEEWR to undertake the Early Childhood Language and Literacy Project in the region and offered the opportunity for pre-schools to participate. Dalaigur took up the opportunity in 2008. Six staff at Dalaigur were trained to implement the project. Ongoing tracking by ALNF and feedback from Dalaigur staff indicate that the program has been highly successful in supporting language and literacy development of the children.

NAPCAN:
Dalaigur has worked with NAPCAN since 2009 in implementing the All Children Being Safe (ACBS) Pre-School Program. This work has focused on identifying the individual needs of Dalaigur children, family and staff regarding child protection and ways in which the needs can be supported through ACBS. Dalaigur highlights the success of this program in enabling children to talk about their feelings and reducing hurting and violence between children.

Early Intervention Disability Support:
Dalaigur works closely with early intervention services to provide support for the families of children with disabilities. Dalaigur describes that engagement with early intervention services has increased considerably because the service now comes to Dalaigur, whereas in the past parents would not go to the service. Dalaigur also partners with Gunawirra foundation to provide further support to these families through camp experiences that reduce their isolation by connecting them with other Aboriginal families with similar experiences and allowing them to discuss issues.

Principles and objectives for working in partnership

Janet Jensen, Director of Dalaigur Pre-School, and Roslyn 'Lotti' Moseley, staff member at Dalaigur Pre-School, describe that key principles that underpin their approach to working in partnership include:

- It is vital to ensure that programs are effective and acceptable to the community.
- Staffs of partner organisations need to respect and understand the importance of local Aboriginal culture.
- Partners need to be trusting and accepting of the way in which staff at Dalaigur work.
- Partners should not 'come in on a thought and a theory' but with an open mind to develop the program together. *'It's about working together and respecting each other's thoughts.'*
- Partners should be receptive and *'ready to change.'*
- *'We don't need to be saved, we just want to be taught.'*
- *'We need to have our parents engaged, if they don't think it's good for their children then we will go with them. They are the first teachers and we are the next step to guide them through.'*
- *'It has to go both ways. We've got to accept that all children will be mainstreamed, it's a mainstream life and we need to give these tools to these children so that they can go into a non-Indigenous context and take on the world, but they still keep their culture inside.'*

The goals for Dalaigur working in partnership include:

- developing quality programs that support children and families;
- ensuring the service provides holistic support that addresses all the needs of children and families: operating as a hub service;
- providing training and skills development for staff;

- ❖ obtaining funding and resources to grow and strengthen the service;
- ❖ promoting Dalaigur and sharing the strengths of their approach.

Agreements

The partnership relationships that Dalaigur engages in are largely informal and they have not entered into any formal partnership agreements or developed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

Dalaigur describes that an openness to different ways of implementing a program that are culturally appropriate for their children and families is a bottom line requirement for engaging in the partnership: '*we promote ourselves as Indigenous education and that's why we always reserve the right to adapt programs for that purpose*.' Where an organisation is not open to including culture, Dalaigur will not work with them.

Practices – Working together

As an example, Dalaigur Pre-School and ALNF identify the following key practices for working successfully in their partnership:

Building relationships

- ❖ ALNF has an ongoing relationship with Dalaigur that Mary-Ruth Mendell, co-chair of ALNF describes as *'up close and personal rather than just bobbing up, doing our thing and going.'* Dalaigur recognises that strong relationships develop when partners *'keep coming back.'*
- ❖ Relationship building between Dalaigur staff and families, and ALNF has happened through regular visits and interaction with staff and families not only on a working basis but also through information sessions, posters and events such as pizza nights. Mary-Ruth describes, *'It's very participatory. We're around, we're doing things, we're with the kids, we're showing and telling and being there.'*

Open and honest communication

- ❖ Regular, open discussions and negotiations of how the program will work.
- ❖ Constructive conversations: Janet and Lotti explain, '*If something comes up and we don't like it, we don't react negatively, we discuss why they're doing it that way*.'
- ❖ Communicating and working closely with parents and children is a priority, as well as checking permission and listening to feedback from Elders and local service leaders.
- ❖ Cultural ways of communication are respected and ALNF seeks advice from all of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners about who to ask about particular matters and how to ask correctly in order to establish respect, co-operation and understanding with the community.

Flexibility

- ❖ Flexibility is key to the working relationship, but establishing agreements and processes for working together is also considered important, as long as this happens '*without getting caught up in paperwork*.'

Monitoring and evaluation:

- ❖ No evaluation processes focus specifically on Dalaigur's partnership relationships.
- ❖ There is a focus on monitoring the development of children in the service and the impact of programs implemented through partnerships. This includes a long-term outcomes focus, for example, by monitoring the future success of children in school.
- ❖ Video recordings are a key approach to documenting progress and impacts.
- ❖ ALNF staff pre and post test children at the beginning and end of the year to assess impacts of the program. They also teach staff and some parents at Dalaigur how to do testing and internal tracking of the children.

Capacity building

The range of partnerships that Dalaigur engages in build capacity in the following key areas:

Professional development and workforce:
Partnerships enable opportunities for Dalaigur staff training and development provided by partners. For example, as a result of training provided by ALNF, staff develop focussed knowledge about the children in their care and talk about this with parents, colleagues and outside professionals. Janet explains that this empowers staff and '*builds their self-esteem*.' Mary-Ruth explains that while some Aboriginal staff may not have formal qualifications, their strengths in caring for and supporting children are needed in early childhood services:

> *'We can give them enough specialised learning and understanding and they're really effective with the children, then in time they can go on and do their study as their families get older, but don't miss out on their energy, insights and knowledge of children just because they don't have the qualifications.'*

Funding and resourcing:
Collaborative work has enabled Dalaigur to obtain significant resources to enhance their teaching practice. These have included:

- o Resources supporting the ALNF language and literacy program including books, puppets and sound teaching cards with visual cues.
- o A variety of resources to support the NAPCAN All Children Being Safe program, including visual and interactive resources tailored at the request of Dalaigur to teaching for the different learning styles and needs of the children.

Program development:
Michelle Rose, All Children Being Safe Pre-School Program Coordinator at NAPCAN, describes that working with Dalaigur has had significant impacts for the

development of the ACBS program for NAPCAN which will have broader impacts on the approach of NAPCAN as they develop and expand ACBS:

> *'Dalaigur's evaluation of the ACBS program which had previously been implemented, conveyed to us that we now need to include domestic violence, trauma and separation into the ACBS Preschool Program. This evaluation gave the program the direction we needed to cater for Dalaigur's individual needs, as these issues are an ongoing major concern to the staff, families and children at Dalaigur.'*

Cultural competency

Dalaigur is strong in the delivery of effective culturally appropriate programs and adapting the programs of others to be culturally appropriate for Dalaigur children and families. By sharing this strength and knowledge of culture, partner organisations like ALNF learn as much from Dalaigur as Dalaigur learns from them. Approaches that have promoted understanding of culture and ways of working differently with Aboriginal children and families for Dalaigur's partners include:

- Staff linking role: Dalaigur have provided training for an Aboriginal staff member to take a linking role in the relationship between children and families at Dalaigur and early intervention disability support services. This link has been critical to making parents feel more comfortable using the service. The staff member has also helped to ensure that supports for the children are incorporated in the classroom.
- Consulting with families and community: Decisions that are made at the centre require the support of families: '*No matter what we introduce, it goes through the parents first in our meetings, and if we can't get them at meetings we'll get them on bus runs or I'll do house calls and check their issues and concerns.*' Consulting with Elders in the community also plays an important role in providing guidance for programs and for developing first language resources: '*in Kempsey we spoke with the Elders as well and they guided our thinking on lots of important things to do with Kempsey children.'*

ALNF shows a strong commitment to working differently and respectfully in Aboriginal communities. Dalaigur recognises that many ALNF resources and ways of teaching are already culturally appropriate and that the use of visual learning tools assists Aboriginal children who often experience hearing difficulties. Mary-Ruth describes the need for culturally appropriate resource development: '*Australia is only just realising that Aboriginal children haven't had books that have Aboriginal children in them or pictures that illustrate where they live.*' She describes that these resources significantly increase the engagement of children.

In some communities they have worked in, ALNF has put forward a document to Elders about how they will conduct themselves in the community to build a dialogue and understanding at the start of the relationship. The organisation also works with community liaison officers who play an important role in communicating and organising people for meetings.

Significant challenges

Significant challenges identified by Dalaigur Pre-School in their partnerships include:

- Short-term and limited program funding that hinders partnership development beyond the funded activities.
- The capacity of Dalaigur is stretched and time for partnership development depends on the dedication of staff: '*We do it on a shoe string.*' Dalaigur builds on their holistic care and support model through partnerships but often isn't funded for the additional work they do and staff work well beyond regular hours.

Outcomes and opportunities

Dalaigur and partner organisations have described further specific outcomes for the service, staff, children and families that they link to what has been achieved through partnership work. These include:

- Dalaigur has become a service of choice in the area and has a waiting list that includes a large number of non-Aboriginal families.
- Parents have become more aware of the support needs of children with disabilities and support has improved through increased access to early intervention services and the camps conducted for families.
- Dalaigur is regularly asked to showcase their work and to share with other services about incorporating culture into everyday learning. They have received a number of awards for their work.
- Dalaigur employs mostly Aboriginal staff who '*are providing a better service than someone with a university degree could*.'
- Literacy practices are changing in households and '*parents are doing literacy based things with their kids that they would never have done before.*'
- Through ACBS children have developed understanding of their emotions and developed ways to express themselves. Children at Dalaigur '*have self initiated linking their learning to home*' and have been discussing ACBS stories and activities with their families
- As a result of children learning about personal safety and linking this learning to knowledge about their own bodies through ACBS, '*a lot of hurting and violence at school has stopped*.'
- There is an opportunity for ALNF to do something more long-term and sustainable with Dalaigur. They are proposing the development of an '*integrated hub'* that would include training for teachers and parents and support for speech pathologists and occupational therapists. This would be a dedicated training place where other related resources could be brought in, for example in areas of nutrition and baby care.

Partnership Case Study 6

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat NSW (AbSec)

The Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat NSW (AbSec)

AbSec is a not-for-profit incorporated community organisation. The organisation is primarily funded by the New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and is recognised as the peak NSW Aboriginal organisation providing child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) policy advice on issues affecting Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities. AbSec's membership primarily comprises of Aboriginal OOHC and family support agencies along with foster and kinship carers.

PARTNERSHIP FOCUS 1: KEEP THEM SAFE

Agreements and principles for working in partnership

On 17 March 2010 AbSec and FaCS signed a Memorandum of Understanding which recognised a commitment '*to working together to improve service delivery for Aboriginal children, young people, their families and communities at risk of harm, through better consultation and service design*.' The MoU relates specifically to the development and delivery of two pilot projects as a component of *Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing*, which is '*the NSW Government's five-year plan to fundamentally change the way children and families are supported and protected*.' The two services identified in the MoU are:

- Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT) which is '*an Aboriginal child specialist advice and support model of consultation based on the Victorian Lakidjeka model*.'
- Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS), which provides an intensive, time—limited, home based program for Aboriginal families in crisis.

Under this agreement two pilot services are being developed for both PACT and IFBS. The collaborative work seeks to pilot the implementation of key recommendations of the *Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in New South Wales (2008)*.

Beyond the two specific *Keep Them Safe* pilot projects, the MoU identifies that further purposes of the agreement are:

- to ensure a culturally appropriate response to protecting Aboriginal children at risk of harm and reduce the number of children coming into contact with the child protection system.
- to ensure the SNAICC endorsed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles are acknowledged and inform policy and service provision.

The principles section of the MoU further identifies that the MoU will '*set out*

practical mechanisms for real consultation and collaboration' in key areas including:

- '*building the capacity of Aboriginal NGOs, including workforce development, to deliver child protection services to Aboriginal clients*.'
- '*expanding the capacity of mainstream NGOs, including workforce development and cultural training, to foster partnerships with Aboriginal agencies and deliver culturally appropriate child protection and family support to Aboriginal clients*.'
- '*developing models for effective consultation and service delivery across the spectrum of child protection services*.'

The MoU establishes a steering committee to provide leadership and oversee the implementation of the MoU commitments with responsibility to: develop reporting, governance and accountability mechanisms; identify priority areas for collaboration; produce an annual workplan and develop performance indicators to measure progress. The principal members of the steering committee are AbSec, FaCS and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA).

Practices – Working together

The 2009-2010 *Keep them Safe* annual report described that the MoU:[334]

'is historic in its nature and 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.'

AbSec describes a strong working relationship with the Aboriginal Services Branch and senior staff in the Department. AbSec Operations Manager, Samantha Joseph, explains that the MoU '*has created a more level playing field where we are no longer just reacting to government but planning with government*.'

Key ways that the MoU supports a more equal working relationship between AbSec and FaCS in relation to the two *Keep Them Safe* projects include:

- AbSec can point to the commitments and agreed processes and as a result, negotiate from a stronger position.
- There is an identified and shared viewpoint about what the outcomes of the work together will be.
- The identification of a *'tangible project'* to be undertaken in partnership between FaCS and AbSec creates the opportunity to work closely together. This extends well beyond a typical service agreement in terms of collaborative work between government and NGO staff.
- The MoU ensures that AbSec has a strong voice and a '*seat at the table*' at various levels, including senior executive and service development and management levels.

[334] Keep Them Safe Annual Report 2009-2010, available at: http://www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au/resources/publications

- ❖ As a result of the MoU, '*mirrored*' staffing positions have been established in FaCS and AbSec for the development of the IFBS and PACT services and have promoted collaborative work between staff on project teams that go across agencies.

Focus on partnerships for the development of PACT

The PACT service is being piloted in two locations and is currently in the development phase. The tender process for PACT services has included requirements for services to be Aboriginal community-controlled and have a demonstrated quality of relationship with the local Aboriginal community.

Cross-agency project teams and mirrored staffing arrangements are currently a strength of the partnership for developing the PACT service, encouraging more equal working relationships between staff of AbSec and FaCS. Staff of both organisations identify that there is a positive, open, flexible and constructive working relationship. When attending meetings in the community, staff go together as a project team which is important in communicating that the service is being developed together by government and the Aboriginal non-government sector.

While the relationship is working well at the development and management level it has been identified that a significant challenge will be ensuring effective partnership relationships between the PACT service delivery organisations and local Community Service Centres (CSCs). This will be critical to the success of PACT in providing specialist advice and support. There is a current focus on identifying strategies for supporting effective partnership at the local level and these include:

- ❖ Early on, staff worked in ways the community considered culturally inappropriate the establishment of local implementation groups which will include representatives from AbSec, the PACT service provider, the CSCs and, regional Community Services staff.
- ❖ Ensuring at the outset that PACT staff and CSC staff present together at community meetings.
- ❖ Developing training for CSC staff that is delivered jointly by PACT and Community Services.
- ❖ The development of local level Memoranda of Understanding between the CSCs and PACT service providers.

These strategies remain at the negotiation stage and, for example, the development of local level MoUs has not yet been agreed. The AbSec Senior Program Manager, Angela Webb, believes that this will be an important process: '*from my perspective we need to have something more formal in terms of agreement, something at the local level that staff can refer back to when there are issues*.' This approach could be critical to ensuring PACT staff are empowered to address problems and work on a more equal footing with CSC staff.

PARTNERSHIP FOCUS 2: CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The capacity building approach

The AbSec/ACWA Capacity Building Project is seeking to develop new Aboriginal OOHC agencies through partnerships between existing large and effective non-Aboriginal OOHC providers and Aboriginal communities. The project is in initial stages of partnership negotiation and development and is being undertaken in 3-4 locations, with agreement to extend the capacity building activities to address the capacity gap for Aboriginal agencies statewide. The project proposes auspicing arrangements through which mainstream service providers will support the growth, development and accreditation of new Aboriginal agencies that will transition to autonomous governance within an agreed timeframe.

Aspects of the approach that show promise for building respectful and effective partnerships include:

- ❖ AbSec as both an Aboriginal controlled organisation and the peak body for Aboriginal OOHC providers in NSW is taking a leading role and ensuring the approach reflects both good practice in service provision for Aboriginal children and families and the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples.
- ❖ There is a funded role for brokering partnerships and facilitating initial partnership development that sits with the AbSec Capacity Building Manager. This role enhances the negotiating position of Aboriginal communities and new Aboriginal service providers.
- ❖ Agreements are being established from the start, which clearly identify partnership goals and include a commitment from mainstream organisations to a supported transition to autonomous governance for the new Aboriginal agency.
- ❖ The capacity building approach is being tailored to the needs of local communities, taking account of needs, existing service provision and the challenges in rural and remote locations.
- ❖ The project is being implemented by AbSec and ACWA in partnership, with significant support from FaCS and reflects a commitment to respectful and effective partnership at all levels.

Principles that underpin the approach

The approach seeks to ensure that relationships are underpinned by principles of effective and respectful partnership with Aboriginal organisations. AbSec is giving significant attention to identifying the baseline commitment this requires from mainstream organisations. Elements of this commitment identified by AbSec include:[335]

- Commitment to recruitment, employment and support of Aboriginal carers.
- Understanding of and commitment to Aboriginal Child Placement Principles.
- Demonstrated cultural proficiency and commitment to cultural support for Aboriginal children, young people and families.
- Plans to support the auspiced service to achieve accreditation, autonomous

[335] Note: These principles reflect the position of Absec. Probity issues relating to auspice organisations for the capacity building project are currently being negotiated with FaCS.

governance and organisational capacity.
- Commitment that is motivated by a desire to grow the Aboriginal service sector and improve outcomes for Aboriginal families rather than specific financial and growth benefits for the mainstream agency.

Practices: Facilitating effective partnerships

AbSec and ACWA identify that facilitating effective partnerships between mainstream organisations and Aboriginal communities and agencies will require:

- ❖ Ongoing communication with Aboriginal communities and agencies from AbSec to ensure the flow of information to and from them is open and transparent.
- ❖ Communication and leadership from ACWA and FaCS with mainstream services to encourage their engagement and participation.
- ❖ Commitment from FaCS to develop referral and communication strategies that ensure the engagement of local and regional level FaCS staff.
- ❖ Appropriate consultation of Aboriginal communities at all stages of the project.
- ❖ Assessment of the suitability of individual mainstream agencies to participate in a meaningful way.

Though the project is only in early stages of development, some specific types of capacity building support that could be provided by auspice organisations that AbSec have identified include:

- ❖ Sharing infrastructure through initial co-location to reduce start-up costs for new agencies.
- ❖ Assisting with financial management.
- ❖ Providing supervision for OOHC workers.
- ❖ Making training opportunities within the auspice organisation available to workers of the new agency initially and on an ongoing basis.
- ❖ Developing local workforce capacity by supporting the employment and training of Aboriginal staff.
- ❖ Providing new agencies with opportunities to experience, observe and learn from current good practice.

Partnership Case Study 7

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Child and Family Service Alliance Members

The partnership

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) is a Victorian initiative that was proposed out of a review of the Family Services Innovations project in 2007. Child FIRST is part of the Integrated Family Services model, and provides intake, assessment and case management services to vulnerable children, young people and their families, with the aim of intervening earlier to address children's vulnerability and of limiting Child Protection involvement where possible.

Each Child FIRST service within Victoria sits within a Child and Family Service Alliance; a governance structure joining together registered child and family service providers, DHS and other stakeholders within a given catchment area. Each Alliance has a facilitating partner who chairs the Alliance Executive and is generally also the Child FIRST provider agency. VACCA (East Brunswick) is a member agency across four of these Alliances in the North & West Metropolitan Region, (facilitated by Children's Protection Society, MacKillop Family Services, Anglicare Victoria and Kildonan UnitingCare respectively). This case study focuses on the work of VACCA in partnership with Alliance members, and especially in the Hume Moreland Integrated Family Services (HMIFS) Alliance, within which Kildonan UnitingCare is the facilitating partner of the Alliance and the Child FIRST provider.

When Child FIRST was rolled out VACCA advocated strongly to have an Aboriginal strategy and resources identified, so that Aboriginal families were visible and appropriately supported. Alliance members supported this position and funding was redirected from four of the Child and Family Service Alliances upon which VACCA sat to provide for a VACCA staff member to take the position of Aboriginal Liaison Worker (ALW). The ALW role provides advice and support in relation to referrals that come through for Aboriginal families. This occurs at the intake and allocation stage and once an Aboriginal family is allocated to a mainstream service, to provide support alongside the agency worker. Other Alliance members supported this initiative, as they believed this would genuinely assist the Integrated Family Services model (including Child FIRST) to provide a more culturally appropriate response for Aboriginal families.

Objectives and negotiations

The Alliance partnership is characterised by complex structures. The Alliance includes child and family service providers, one of whom is also the Child FIRST provider and who also takes on the role of partnership facilitator, and the Department who are the funder, the contract manager for individual child and family services agencies and monitors their performance and is the child protection service deliverer. Valerie Ayres-Wearne, the HMIFS Alliance Senior Project Manager, explains that integrating all of these systems is a complex undertaking,

and so it is critical to articulate what you're trying to achieve. It is also important to routinely unpack and analyse what role each organisation is playing, how the relationships are working, and how the expectations of the collective are weighing up against those of the individuals concerned.

From VACCA's point of view a key objective from the outset has been to work with and through the Alliances to align the Child FIRST model with principles that VACCA believes underpin an effective approach to Aboriginal service provision. These principles are:[336]

- Self-determination – That is, the commitment to decisions about Aboriginal people being made by Aboriginal people.
- The principle of Aboriginal services first - That is, wherever possible, services for Aboriginal people are delivered by Aboriginal organisations.
- Self-Management – That is, Aboriginal services are responsible for service delivery to Aboriginal families, thereby understanding issues, targeting responses and advocating solutions.

Gabrielle Burke, Manager of Child and Family Projects at VACCA, points to the initial work with the Alliance partners as being critical to get all parties '*on the same page…and saying the same thing*.' A crucial element has been the respectful relationships with service providers and government that were formed over time, before and outside of the specific Alliance structure.

Valerie describes that changes in the way the Alliance operates, including the development of the ALW role have emerged from a shared objective to improve support for Aboriginal families and a willingness of Alliance members to engage in conversations about how this could be achieved and the resources that could be put towards it. She feels that the partnership with VACCA is progressing more and more to what she calls the '*higher end*' of the partnership scale. She focuses on the quality of the dialogue as a key factor in partnership negotiations, with the secret being '*a capacity to keep the conversation going…and not dig in*.'

Kerry Crawford, Executive Manager of Early Intervention and Family Services at VACCA, explains that it was very important for VACCA to have '*champions*' to push their cause at the initial stage, because as an Aboriginal organisation there were some elements that were non-negotiable. The open and transparent nature of the partnership allowed these discussions to happen and Alliance members were able to support VACCA positions.

A shared vision, having *'somewhere you want to go'* as Gabrielle describes, is also a critical element, including having someone within the partnership who can articulate the vision and help push towards it. Valerie confirms this, '*people always say that partnerships have to have a vision, and in the end those things are really critical, because that's what keeps you at it*.'

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[336] Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2011). *VACCA Child FIRST - An Intake, Assessment and Referral Service for Aboriginal children and families in the North and West Region*, July. Retrieved 25 January 2012, from the World Wide Web: http://www.vacca.org/resources-information/vacca-child-first

Kerry believes that for partnership negotiation to be successful, the partnership needs to occur from a strategic push within the sector. She feels that government is removed from the day-to-day business of child and family services, and that therefore autocratic, top-down design processes don't meet the individual needs of the sector. What is needed is for the sector to come together to present their bid, their design, to government.

Practices – Working together

Kerry, Gabrielle and Valerie identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Building relationships

- Respectful relationships with service providers and government were formed over time, before and outside of the specific Alliance structure. VACCA views the Alliance as an '*open, transparent meeting of significant people'*, where the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) is considered a partner, as opposed to a leader.
- VACCA has developed strong relationships with Alliance members at CEO and program manager levels, as well as a strong working relationship with DHS. A change in recent years is for government to attend meetings at VACCA, which is an important shift from '*Aboriginal organisation having to leave the office, go and sit in these clinical governmental processes and be…overwhelmed with the amount of non-Aboriginal processes.'*

Open and honest communication

- Respectful leadership, trust, open and honest communication, and a willingness to work together enable important and challenging discussions to happen.
- Working through disagreements constructively, including balancing the fine line between maintaining your own integrity and position, and being respectful and supportive of the position of others.

Shared planning processes

- Good planning is a key ingredient: '*you don't have to have everything locked up, but you need to be on a journey, and you need to be keeping on reflecting on that.'*
- It is critical for all implementing partners to jointly discuss and define what mutual accountability means within the context of the partnership. This involves conceptualising what the partnership will mean in practice in terms of what individual organisational requirements and responsibilities are.

Facilitation

- The role of the partnership facilitator is key. They must keep everybody's interests in mind, constantly 'trying to listen and understand.' Valerie describes that they have to: *'Keep the helicopter view all the time,*

and…see all the different pressures and how they're all working. But then you try and do something about it together.'

- Valerie describes this role as being like the glue that holds the partnership together. In recognition of the importance of the Alliance facilitation role, Valerie believes that dedicated government funding is needed to support the Alliance facilitation role - taking carriage of the project to '*support, drive and facilitate it.*'
- A key strength of the partnership has been having an Alliance facilitator who maintains respectful, strong relationships with all key stakeholders.

Sustainability

- One danger within a partnership journey is that key people can leave. Whilst the partnership requires people to actively drive it and create change, it can't be solely reliant on particular people: '*The more everyone shares in the commitment, and takes ownership of it, the more likely it will be sustainable. And we've seen that to some degree.'*

Monitoring and evaluation:

- VACCA intends to conduct an internal evaluation of the proposed Child FIRST, as part of their strategic and team plans, however this won't include an evaluation of the Alliance partnership itself.
- The state government has evaluated the child and family service reforms including the implementation of Child FIRST and Alliance partnerships, with KPMG carrying out the review.
- The highly intensive and demanding service delivery often takes away from the time there is to reflect with partners on progress.
- Kerry Crawford identifies that current evaluation models need to be improved to provide a stronger focus on outcomes for families.

Outcomes and opportunities

The next stage in VACCA's engagement with Child FIRST has been the development of a proposal for a new Child FIRST service to be delivered by VACCA for Aboriginal families in the North and West Regions of Melbourne. Child FIRST had grown significantly and so VACCA decided to review the ALW role. It became apparent that demand at Child FIRST was continuing to grow with re-occurring demand capacity pressures leading to repeated periods of restricted intake. With this increased demand, a growing percentage of all referrals to Child FIRST were coming from Child Protection. This included referrals for Aboriginal families. Valerie indicated that in the midst of these increasing pressures, the need to strengthen the interface processes between each of the Child FIRST's in the region and VACCA was clearly apparent. From Kerry's perspective the ALW role was being sidelined, the relationships weren't functioning well and the ALW wasn't taking on many cases. In short, Aboriginal families weren't receiving the support they needed.

The new Child FIRST will reflect new ways of doing business, as Kerry describes,

'What we're going to have is services that are set up that understand the needs of families first and foremost, because we are those families.'

Kerry views this as the '*third stage*' of Child FIRST for Aboriginal families, building from initial lack of involvement to the implementation of the ALW role and now towards real Aboriginal leadership. Whilst they initially detected caution from government and the sector towards the idea, they now feel that the Alliances and DHS are very positive about the proposal. Kerry and Gabrielle attribute this change in attitudes to two factors: firstly, the established relationships meant that difficult conversations and negotiations could happen, and keep on happening, until the issues were resolved. Gabrielle comments that Kerry's ongoing work building relationships, trust and confidence with the Alliance partners has been critical in getting support for this proposal, '*…when everyone's on the same page and everyone's saying the same thing, it's much more likely to happen*.' If the partnership hadn't been in place she feels that the mainstream organisations could have continued to be quite resistant to the idea.

Kerry comments that a further aspect contributing to the viability of the proposal and support from Alliance partners is VACCA's reputation as a stable, financially viable and quality service provider, having '*…a steady measured approach to Aboriginal business. So it's one of those organisations you can have absolute confidence in.*'

Partnership Case Study 8

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Berry Street Victoria

The partnership

The Integrated Family Violence program was rolled out in Victoria as a cross-agency and cross-government response to family violence. There was recognition that there was a need for an intensive and better funded response to case management for Aboriginal women and children. Emerging from this, VACCA and Berry Street developed a joint submission to provide the Indigenous Case Management component of the Integrated Family Violence Services, Women and Children (IFVS) in early 2009. They are funded to provide the service jointly until June 2012.

Berry Street receives all L17 Family Violence referrals from the police and provides the intake function for the partnership, which includes the broader NIFVS group of service providers. At the point of intake Aboriginal women are given the option of working with VACCA or a mainstream service. In mid-2010 VACCA and Berry Street identified that in practice referrals for Aboriginal women were not coming across to VACCA. Kerry Crawford, the Executive Manager of Early Intervention and Family Services at VACCA explains that there was a need to develop new ways of working and that '*it's not about Berry Street not wanting to refer, we just had to flesh through how this was going to work.*'

A major initiative put in place at this time to address partnership challenges was a full-time staff secondment. Gayle Correnti, an experienced Family Violence program manager from Berry Street was seconded to VACCA for 12 weeks. This provided an opportunity to develop systems, reporting mechanisms and referral processes that were complementary and for Berry Street to develop understanding around how they could fit in with the way VACCA needed to do business.

Objectives and enabling factors

This partnership is enabled by a strong organisational commitment on both sides to working together and a long-standing relationship between the two organisations. Partnership work is supported by senior staff at Berry Street who understand why the relationship with VACCA is so important. Craig Cowie, Director, North West Region at Berry Street, explains that it was easy to convince others in the organisation that although the staff secondment would cause strain on the organisation, it wasn't a matter that Berry Street couldn't afford to lose Gayle for that time, it was that *'we really couldn't afford not to.'* There is strong respect between the CEOs and Craig identifies that this *'clearly filters down and influences how the rest of the organisation is expected to do business in the Aboriginal space.'*

The two organisations have worked closely together and alongside MacKillop Family Services to develop the *Building Respectful Partnerships* resource, which describes how mainstream family services can build Aboriginal cultural competence to deliver effective services for Aboriginal children and families and includes a focus

on building respectful partnerships with Aboriginal organisations.

The objectives of VACCA and Berry Street align strongly around the commitment to addressing the needs of families and getting to the bottom line, which Craig describes as '*safety and no violence*.' There have been significant differences in approach and Kerry identifies the need to unpack why family violence happens and deliver a service that meets the needs of families and isn't based on 'a Western concept of how family violence can be managed.' Craig describes the commitment of Berry Street to working differently with Aboriginal families with a focus in the partnership on understanding '*from VACCA's point of view what is it that they need to do business the way they want to do it*.'

Negotiation and agreements

Negotiating a way forward to develop the service and the partnership has been about being open to the conversation and being creative. Craig explains:

> *'it was a conversation about where do we start, acknowledging that we couldn't do everything in one hit. So we decided to start with the priority that we needed to do something different…to connect the organisations and meet the objectives we had in our partnership.'*

It was an '*organic process that has really grown, and we've done a lot of it by 'coffee management'*.'

Dayle Schwartfeger of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) describes that the work that VACCA and Berry Street are doing together is '*dynamic and evolving*', based on a commitment to working through how they can develop the service in partnership, and '*getting on with it.*' She observes that, what is important is that the partnership agreements are being developed as a result of '*a good process that strengthens the relationship*' rather than having a situation where '*one party feels the partnership has been imposed*.'

Craig identifies that being clear in agreements is critical where resources are being shared or transferred as this has broader implications for how the organisations operate and there is a need to look at the details of how it will work. The organisations highlight the importance of moving from informal processes of negotiation to develop written documents that clarify agreements and expectations. These include the MoU and a work plan for Gayle in relation to her secondment. A new project brief is being developed to detail the next steps in partnership work and a work plan will emerge from this.

Practices – Working together

VACCA and Berry Street identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Building relationships

- Relationships at the management level are supportive, respectful and driven by a group of people who are operating from '*the same platform*.'

- The staff secondment has built understanding between staff in the two organisations and promoted '*a belief that this is a positive relationship to have.*'
- Staff interactions that are taking place at lower levels and contributing to relationship building include the linking of the VACCA family violence counsellor with the Berry Street counselling team and the shared undertaking of professional supervision.

Open and honest communication

- Trust in the relationship enables a depth and sophistication in conversations that is changing the way the work unfolds. Kerry explains: '*They challenge the way professionals in the family violence space think they do their work, and in a lot of ways they think that they do it well, but it's not working for Aboriginal families.'*
- Strong relationships enable informal interactions that support partnership development: '*When you need to do something, you can just talk instead of trying to get through our systems, which are really hard to break into sometimes, to be able to get to the right person and get the right outcome for the client.'*
- Both partners are open to conversation and proactive in their approach challenges that arise: '*we will address them together and be respectful about that*.'

Advocacy within the partnership:

- Being in a partnership significantly increases the voice of organisations with government and the response in terms of funding support.
- Craig identifies the role of mainstream organisation in supporting Aboriginal communities and organisations: '*In terms of say, Aboriginal business, there are some Aboriginal leaders there but they need the second people to come in so that everyone comes in behind them. And that's a role I think that all mainstreams could play.'*

Monitoring and evaluation:

- Evaluation of the partnership has not happened yet, but will be discussed and developed in order to demonstrate success and improvements that have been achieved in partnership.

Government role:

- DHS is taking a highly supportive and unique role in enabling VACCA and Berry Street to work in partnership and develop new models and ways of working in the area of family violence. Kerry explains: '*They're not actually having these paternalistic constraints around what they think. They're very clear about working in a very fluid partnership, not a hierarchical structure where they're saying: we're the funder, you'll deliver. Instead, they're saying: here's a bit of space, let's see what we can do because this needs to be successful.'*

Capacity building

The partnership builds capacity for VACCA and Berry Street in the following key areas:

Professional development and workforce:
Berry Street has learnt from the holistic approach of VACCA and their viewpoint that it is not as important to have a family violence program that is distinct from other family support work. This matches well with the desire of Berry Street to link their family violence work to other services they provide.

A key way that Berry Street continues to support capacity at VACCA is through staff sharing and secondment arrangements as a response to under-resourcing and staffing issues.

Funding and resourcing:
According to Craig, increasing the capacity of Aboriginal organisations has a lot to do with getting the distribution of resources right: '

> *'I think there are a lot of resources in the sector that could and should go to Aboriginal organisations … I think there are a lot of resources that mainstream services have got that should go to Aboriginal controlled organisations and then they would have a better chance, given the scale of their task.'*

This approach is about viewing the resources in the sector as '*community resources*' that exist to meet the needs of families rather than being owned by a particular organisation. Craig believes that pooling and sharing of resources could bring significant positive change and that in line with the principle of self-determination resources should be transferred *'when VACCA says it should happen'*; when they believe they have the capacity and readiness to take resources on.

Cultural competency

Working with VACCA enables staff at Berry Street to understand family issues '*from VACCA's point of view*' and to provide better service to Aboriginal families. Craig describes that the partnership has been necessary to address a situation where:

> *'we were just working with Aboriginal families on our own … it was clearly not useful, not culturally appropriate and not giving Aboriginal families the opportunity to have a culturally appropriate service. We were doing our best in terms of employing some Aboriginal staff but they were not connected in with all the Aboriginal organisations they need to be.'*

Kerry emphasises that the partnership work has to be about new and different ways of working with Aboriginal families that are culturally appropriate and recognise the strengths of Aboriginal people. It should be about a family strengthening and resilience program: *'We're really trying to turn it on its head, move out of this Western concept of what family violence is and address it through a more holistic care team approach.'*

Significant challenges

Significant challenges identified by VACCA and Berry Street in the partnership include:

- In the beginning the partnership *'wasn't working as effectively as it could be.'* Whereas the Berry Street family violence team viewed the way VACCA works as not being best practice, VACCA staff viewed the Berry Street approach as not providing holistic support to families. The partnership has had a strong focus on addressing these issues through staff interaction and shared staffing arrangements to promote shared understanding.
- Staff changeover, especially at VACCA, has been recognised as a possible reason why the partnership didn't gather the momentum it needed in the initial phase. Dayle explains, *'People need time to develop an understanding of a new program … there has to be enough continuity and enough interest and a willingness to work in partnership.'* There is a current focus on systems development within the partnership to ensure that it can continue beyond the work of current staff.
- It is difficult to find the additional time required to undertake partnership work, which puts a strain on individual workers and the organisations. Craig identifies that the lack of resources dedicated to partnership relationships is a threat to the sustainability of the partnership: *'If you don't have someone resourcing it, it drops off when we are all busy and we are all going to continue to be busy.'*
- Staff secondment to support partnership development has created challenges for Berry Street in having to cover the role, skills and time of one of its most senior and experienced managers.

Outcomes and opportunities

Craig believes that in terms of the service Berry Street provides, *'we are getting there to be more culturally appropriate.'*

'In terms of a large mainstream organisation, such as Berry Street, I think to have such a healthy partnership with an organisation like that is unique, because it's not a paternalistic partnership. It brings together the autonomy and sophistication of both organisations that work in the same space really well and then for DHS to also be a clear supportive partner in that is very unique.'

Kerry Crawford, Executive Manager, Early Intervention and Family Services, VACCA

'It's got this very rich potential at the moment, that we think that VACCA and Berry Street are working through and teasing out. […] Sometimes you watch something and you know that there is an energy there that's a really strongly creative energy. That's where I think this will go. There will be some really interesting things that will come out of this that will be valuable, not only in family violence but also around partnerships and around mainstream and Aboriginal organisations working together.'

Dayle Schwartfeger, Program and Service Advisor, Community Programs – Housing, North West Region, DHS

Partnership Case Study 9

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Save the Children

The partnership

In 2003, FaHCSIA approached Save the Children ('StC'), an independent non-governmental organisation guided by principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, about the possibilities of replicating their Playscheme program in Darwin's urban town camps. The StC Playschemes provide a range of play and learning activities to children and parental support in the communities in which they operate. After conversing with different local groups and community members, Save the Children entered a formal partnership with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation ('Larrakia'), a large, membership-based Aboriginal Corporation and representative body of traditional owners, which delivers funded services to large numbers of Aboriginal people in the Darwin region. The partners came together to deliver a culturally appropriate Playscheme for marginalised children and families.

When the partnership was formalised, StC paid an amount to have staff collocated with Larrakia Nation. Three people were employed by Larrakia to work on the Playscheme project through Community Development Employment Projects and topped up by Save the Children. Save also employed the Manager of the Playscheme. The StC Playschemes are now held weekly in four different locations. They are facilitated by local Aboriginal staff, who themselves are supported by qualified early childhood educators and professionals from outside the community. The Playscheme project supports the development of an early childhood workforce and local leadership in the community through the employment of local staff and the inclusion of an advisory committee of local women to provide local management for the playgroups. The partnership has changed over time however, according to needs and priorities, and there are few concrete partnership activities at this stage.

Objectives and principles for working in partnership

Several principles and initial approaches were identified as important in enabling the formation, development and success of the partnership. These included:

- Save the Children engaging and consulting with the local community and its traditional owners before implementing the project.
- The personalities and approaches of key people within the partnership were critical enabling factors. Respect, genuineness, empathy and enthusiasm were essential personal characteristics contributing to the effective operation of the partnership.
- The importance of a respectful and non-judgmental approach of the Save the Children staff was recognised by Larrakia.

Key objectives outlined by the organisations for working in partnership include:

- Both partners commitment to creating an effective and culturally appropriate Playscheme program for disadvantaged and marginalised children and families in Darwin's town camps, and to promote the participation of children and their families within the Playscheme.
- As an outside organisation coming into an Aboriginal community, one of StC's objectives was to collaborate with local Elders and Aboriginal organisations in order to engage with the community effectively.
- Larrakia aimed to engage the local community and its Elders in the delivery of children's services, and to support training and full employment of local community members.
- Another objective if Larrakia was to build connections and relationships with Government officials and to strengthen its position and legitimacy through partnerships.

Agreements

The agreement between the organisations has been translated into a flexible memorandum of understanding ('MoU'). However, this MoU does not have a significant role in the day-to-day operation of the partnership: *'the partnership has not counted on formal documents - it has been much more based on relationships.'*

Practices – Working together

Larrakia and Save the Children identify the following key practices for working successfully in partnership:

Building relationships

- Regular collaboration, support and assistance.
- Mutual understanding of each other's needs.
- Focus on relationship development, built on trust and respect.
- Relationships at management level have been close, supportive and collaborative.
- Co-location of staff for a period supported relationship development
- High level of Aboriginal staff and cultural competency of non-Aboriginal staff of Save the Children

Open and honest communication

- Regular, fluid and informal communication: *'Regular informal chats were the main points of communication. Real casual stuff.'*
- No fear of addressing issues and concerns: frank, positive and proactive approach to disputes and situations where particular participants in the Playscheme were not suitable for their positions.
- Strong communication at the management level.
- Quickly responding to any issues or concerns that arise.

Flexibility

- Flexibility, and adaptability of the partnership, with the possibility to renegotiate according to changing needs, opportunities and priorities of partners.
- *'It was a relationship that was built on trust and respect. It was not about legally binding contracts and outcomes. So it was reasonably flexible, as opposed to loose.'*

Shared planning processes

- joint coordination of the program at the outset, including joint management meetings.

Monitoring and evaluation:

- No formal monitoring or evaluation has taken place due to time-restraints and a belief that monitoring has not been necessary due to evident benefits and positive outcomes of the joint project.
- Positive feedback from the community and Elders affirm that the program is effective and working well: *'...services were being provided that were benefiting the community. That was enough for us.'*

Capacity building

The partnership builds capacity for Larrakia and Save the Children in the following ways:

- Save the Children was well placed to help Larrakia to establish itself with governments, including Northern Territory government departments and FaHCSIA. The partnership with Save the Children provided Larrakia with 'good experience and connections' for government engagement.
- Both organisations benefited from shared collaborative training, '*particularly having a standard approach towards the case management practices for both Larrakia and Save the Children staff.'*
- Both partners invite the other to attend internal training programs. In this way, staff within both organisations have enhanced opportunities for professional development and the partners benefit from shared learning.
- Mutual mentoring and guidance took place in the early stages, including at senor management levels.
- Capacity building occurred later through the cross-over of staff between the two organisations. Larrakia CEO Ilana Eldridge recognises that this practice has contributed more broadly to workforce development in Darwin: *'Darwin has dramatically matured over the last few years, although there is still a long way to go, in terms of the NGO sector getting much more professional and better resourced. This process has contributed to this.'*

Cultural competency

Cultural competency and appropriateness were recognised by both partners as being imperative in their own right and also vital to the success of the Playscheme project in the Larrakia Nation. Particular emphasis was placed on the employment of Aboriginal staff to operate the Playscheme:

> *'If we hadn't have had an NT staff that was Indigenous, it would not have happened. Ninety-eight per cent Aboriginal staff. This was a major factor. It brought cultural understanding and basic trust.'*

Save the Children invested significant time and energy consulting with the Larrakia community before establishing the partnership and the program and, in doing so, developed a strong relationship with the local community. Before the commencement of the Playscheme project, the three Save the Children Playscheme staff underwent significant training to acquire the confidence, knowledge, cultural awareness and skills they needed to effectively implement the program in the Larrakia community. As representatives of traditional Elders, Larrakia was in a position to help Save the Children develop relationships with the community and its Elders in order to engage and work effectively with the community:

> *'This was an important role that Larrakia played in the beginning: skilling up Save the Children about the area and the community and helping them to manage expectations and maintain morale. Reinforcing that people will come, in time. Talking them through it and helping them to have faith'*

> *'Save didn't want to come in as outsiders. This was particularly as all the work was to be with Aboriginal communities. They really wanted input from local communities: wanted it to be based on relationships with them….It is about getting a consensus on what the communities want. Not asking around until you hear the message you want to hear. The community need to be involved from conception.'*

Larrakia recognised that other aspects of the Save the Children approach that were important included: respect for the local Aboriginal community; willingness to learn from them; knowledge of Aboriginal history; providing space for planning from a community perspective; and empathy for the suffering of Aboriginal people.

Significant challenges

There is widespread consensus that the partnership came together without significant problems or barriers. As Travis Borsi, Playscheme Coordinator, NT, explains: '*the relationship from the beginning was fluid and natural: there were no real major* difficulties. Former Larrakia employee, Tania Borsi explained, '*Barriers at the beginning were only around office space issues - logistical stuff.'* Save the Children noted that establishing a relationship of trust with the local community took a significant amount of time: '*…it still took families up to 18 months to fully trust us in*

the set up of the Playscheme.'

Outcomes and opportunities

The partnership and the Playscheme project have yielded a number of positive outcomes and opportunities for both the partners and the local community:

- Increased advocacy and lobbying power for Larrakia that resulted in increased government engagement and led to reforms in the community service sphere. Ilana explains: *It was good for us to have a conduit where we could get our intelligence of what was happening on the ground into policy debate. That was pretty useful. We saw issues getting voiced.'*
- An increase in the Integrity and awareness of Save the Children in the community, allowing Save the Children to gain the trust, respect and support of the local community.
- Enhanced opportunities for Larrakia to expand its services and coordination activities, such as community training on various skill building activities and art workshops.
- The training and capacity building provided by Save the Children has given Larrakia the expertise and confidence to take on new services, such as the targeted family service.
- Ongoing mutual support and a common voice to achieve objectives in a difficult political climate.
- Positive outcomes for the local community such as enhanced employment and training options for community members, higher levels of school attendance amongst those children who have gone through the Playscheme programme and a general increase in the quality of life of people living in the town camps. Kelvin describes:
  'Larrakia started to offer significant programmes for communities that were really needed and appreciated, including the Save the Children program. These all started to make a difference in the life of people in town camps, the quality of life. They saw that.'
- The partners have also provided each other with assistance in applications for funding and grants.

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APPENDIX C
PARTNERSHIP TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Partnerships Research: Topics for Discussion

The topics for discussion address different stages of partnership development, management and review. They are designed to guide the conversation and promote learning about good practices and processes as well as challenges in the partnership relationship. We welcome any other ways that you would like to share the story of the partnership.

Overview of Partnerships and Collaborations
Topics for Discussion • Overview of existing partnerships and collaborations of the organisation • How the specific partnership came about • Factors that enabled the partnership to form • Barriers and challenges at the beginning of the partnership • Overview of partnership activities
Documents • Recorded partnership histories • Overview documents • Newsletters, brochures, fact sheets referencing the partnerships • Reference group documents
Objectives of the Partnership
Topics for Discussion • Reasons for collaborating • Goal setting with the partner • Alignment of objectives • Initial capacity and capacity building goals • Initial cultural awareness and cultural awareness goals
Documents • Goal setting documents • Initial partnership planning documents • Mission / purpose statements
Partnership Negotiation
Topics for Discussion • Details of the negotiation process • Formalisation of the partnership by agreement or working protocols • Mutual respect in the negotiation process • Cultural challenges in the negotiation process • Outcomes of the negotiation and inclusion of mutual objectives
Documents • Negotiation frameworks and processes • Memoranda of Understanding / partnership agreements / contracts • Service agreements

Ongoing Partnership Management
Topics for discussion • Communication and relationships • Cultural competency framework/s • Shared planning processes • Flexibility of the partnership to changing needs and opportunities • Changes in the working relationship over time
Documents • communication protocols • cultural protocols • cultural competency frameworks / documents • strategic planning documents
Evaluation of the Partnership
Topics for discussion • Evaluation of the partnership relationship and/or agreement • Participation in design of monitoring and evaluation processes • Indicators of success and their alignment with mutual objectives • Evaluation of capacity building and cultural competency benefits • Partnership changes as a result of monitoring and evaluation
Documents • monitoring tools / reports • evaluation process and outcome documents • partnership review documents • renegotiated agreements / contracts
Outcomes of the Partnership
Topics for Discussion • Governance and service capacity outcomes • Cultural competency outcomes • Service delivery and access outcomes for children and families • Key factors that enabled or limited outcomes • Opportunities for strengthening partnership
Documents • evaluation outcome documents • partnership review documents

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APPENDIX D
MATRIX: GOOD PRACTICE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

Matrix: Good Practice Partnership Principles and Practices

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.	Long-term commitment to a relationship with organisations and communities, rather than to projects or time-limited activities. Mainstream partner develops strong physical presence with ACCO partner and in the broader community, through, for example, regular phone calls, visits to ACCO office and consultation with Elders and other community members. Including ACCOs from the start of a project or process. Willingness of mainstream partner to invest and engage in issues important to the local community, expressed through the ACCO. Ongoing time invested in personal relationships at all levels of partnership structures. Introducing staffing structures and arrangements geared towards shared learning and relationship building. Upper level management leading by example, with conduct explicitly communicating to staff role and importance of partnership and its implications.	Open and honest discussions, working through the hard issues despite challenges. Partners don't 'dig in' and are prepared to let go of individual needs to achieve shared goals. Focus on formalising agreements to clarify commitments, roles, management structures and processes, and resource allocation. Policies and procedures incorporate partnership agreements and processes, as well as institutional knowledge of partnerships, to prevent 'drop off' when staff are busy or turnover. Agreements are not overly prescriptive, but allow for sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to arising needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities, facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.	Consistent contact with the ACCO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to create opportunities for regular informal interaction and communication. Examples are regular visits to community, participation in community meetings/events and information sessions on partnership activities. Open and honest discussions, face-face or by phone, that address concerns, issues and disputes as they arise. These are conducted face to face, on the phone if necessary, but never by email. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams. Proactively share relevant client and case information within privacy legislation constraints.	Allocate resources to partnership development and management processes. Develop funded facilitation roles that assist in brokering relationships, managing partnership structures and supporting partnership development, including within integrated service delivery models. Longer term, flexible Government funding commitments and models.	Indicators of success are mutually agreed between partners and, where appropriate, jointly reported on.	Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream services to create space for service innovation. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy.	Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements. Mainstream partner employs and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs. Mainstream partner provides supports for obtaining sustainable funding that include: providing information, facilitating links; advocacy and promotion; gap funding; joint submissions and; support for developing submissions.
Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.	Mainstream partner develops strong physical presence with ACCO partner and in the broader community, through, for example, regular phone calls, visits to ACCO office and consultation with Elders and other community members. Bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCO to express community needs and request support.	Mainstream partners listen to and incorporate perspectives and interests of ACCOs and their communities in agreements. This includes recognising ACCO's important role to identify, communicate and respond to community needs. Partnerships incorporate and meet other identified objectives of both partners. Agreements are not overly	Planning is informal, flexible and ongoing, ensuring that the partnership is dynamic and responsive to needs and opportunities. Planning is directed towards a strong vision that is clearly articulated and agreed. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and stakeholder	ACCOs and culturally competent mainstream organisations undertake facilitation roles that assist in incorporating ACCO perspective in partnership relationships and multi-partner structures. Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve	Where an ACCO reports to a partner who is also a funder, the ACCO participates in developing relevant and not overly onerous reporting processes. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes. Evaluation processes acknowledge and incorporate Aboriginal cultural perspectives on evaluation	Government listens and responds to service innovations developed and proposed by strong partnerships that include ACCO perspectives. Mainstream partners with significant broader influence represent 'on-the-ground' realities and perspectives of ACCO partners in policy debate. Mainstream partners listen to	Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Mainstream partners recognise that cultural differences require them to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.	Mainstream partners work with ACCOs to identify opportunities for staff training, mentoring and skills development in key areas of need ACCOs identify. Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs.

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
	Including ACCOs from the start of a project or process. Mainstream partners open to applying their ideas, skills and resources in different and culturally appropriate ways of working. Willingness of mainstream partner to invest and engage in issues important to the local community, expressed through the ACCO.	prescriptive, but allow for sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to arising needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities, facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.	information sessions. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams.	good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen ACCO role and capacity. Longer term, flexible Government funding commitments and models. Government children and family support programs specify and support roles for ACCOs and mainstream partners in a partnership model, where mainstream role is necessary. Integrated service delivery systems articulate the significant role of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs, and incorporate resources and timelines that enable their effective participation.	including, for example, qualitative feedback and storytelling approaches. Mainstream partners listen to and support the perspectives of ACCO partners on effective responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs. Indicators of success are mutually agreed between partners and, where appropriate, jointly reported on.	and support ACCO perspectives on effective responses to community needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy.	Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements. Mainstream partner employs and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Mainstream partners utilise and develop framework documents to describe and inform their approach to developing cultural competency, including Reconciliation Action Plans. This process includes input and support from ACCO partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Mainstream partners have a commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	Mainstream partners provide support for governance system development that promotes strong and autonomous governance structures that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership. Mainstream partners support transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Government and NGO peak bodies identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for ACCO child and family service delivery, and strategically address capacity gaps by supporting and enabling partnerships.
Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCO to express community needs and request support. ACCOs making clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work with Aboriginal children and families and the ways that mainstream partners can support. Willingness of mainstream partners to invest and engage in issues important to the local community, expressed through the ACCO.	Mainstream partners listen to and incorporate perspectives and interests of ACCOs and their communities in agreements. This includes recognising ACCO's important role to identify, communicate and respond to community needs. Partnerships incorporate and meet other identified objectives of both partners. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities,	Planning is informal, flexible and ongoing, ensuring that the partnership is dynamic and responsive to needs and opportunities. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and stakeholder information sessions. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams.	Funding for service delivery in partnership is pooled and flexible, enabling collaborative and creative response to community needs. Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen ACCO role and capacity.	Where an ACCO reports to a partner who is also a funder, the ACCO participates in developing relevant and not overly onerous reporting processes. Partners provide support to ACCOs for evaluation capacity development and data collection processes. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes. Mainstream partners listen to	Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream services to create space for service innovation. Government listens and responds to service innovations developed and proposed by strong partnerships that include ACCO perspectives. Mainstream partners with significant broader influence represent 'on-the-ground' realities and perspectives of	Mainstream partners recognise that cultural differences require them to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Mainstream partner employs and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Mainstream partners have a	Mainstream partners work with ACCOs to identify opportunities for staff training, mentoring and skills development in key areas of need ACCOs identify. Mainstream partners make recommendations and offers to ACCO partners in relation to training needs that make clear what they can provide. Mainstream partners provide support for governance system development that promotes strong and autonomous governance structures that enable Aboriginal community

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
		facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.		Integrated service delivery systems articulate the significant role of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs, and incorporate resources and timelines that enable their effective participation.	and support the perspectives of ACCO partners on effective responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs.	ACCO partners in policy debate. Mainstream partners listen to and support ACCO perspectives on effective responses to community needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy.	commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	leadership. Mainstream partner provides supports for obtaining sustainable funding that include: providing information, facilitating links; advocacy and promotion; gap funding; joint submissions and; support for developing submissions. Government and NGO peak bodies identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for ACCO child and family service delivery, and strategically address capacity gaps by supporting and enabling partnerships.
Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities	Long-term commitment to a relationship with organisations and communities, rather than to particular projects or time-limited activities. ACCOs making clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and the ways that mainstream partners can support.	Negotiations are based upon a shared objective to improve outcomes for children and families. Agreements are not overly prescriptive, but allow for sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to arising needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities, facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.	Planning is informal, flexible and ongoing, ensuring that the partnership is dynamic and responsive to needs and opportunities. Planning is directed towards a strong vision that is clearly articulated and agreed.	Allocate resources to partnership development and management processes. Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen ACCO role and capacity. Longer term, flexible Government funding commitments and models. Funding for service delivery in partnership is pooled and flexible, enabling collaborative and creative response to community needs. Government children and family support programs specify and support roles for ACCOs and mainstream partners in a partnership model, where mainstream role is necessary. Integrated service delivery systems articulate the significant role of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs, and incorporate resources and timelines that enable their effective participation.			Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Mainstream partner employs and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Mainstream partners have a commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs.	Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs. Mainstream partner provides supports for obtaining sustainable funding that include: providing information, facilitating links; advocacy and promotion; gap funding; joint submissions and; support for developing submissions. Mainstream partners support transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Government and NGO peak bodies identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for ACCO child and family service delivery, and strategically address capacity gaps by supporting and enabling partnerships.

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities	Introducing staffing structures and arrangements geared towards shared learning and relationship building. ACCOs making clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and the ways that mainstream partners can support. Mainstream partners open to applying their ideas, skills and resources in different and culturally appropriate ways of working. Including ACCOs from the start of a project or process. Upper level management leading by example, with conduct explicitly communicating to staff role and importance of partnership and its implications.	Open and honest discussions, working through the hard issues despite challenges. Partners don't 'dig in' and are prepared to let go of individual needs to achieve shared goals. Negotiations are based on shared objective to improve outcomes for children and families. Focus on formalising agreements to clarify commitments, roles, management structures and processes, and resource allocation. Policies and procedures incorporate partnership agreements and processes, as well as institutional knowledge of partnerships, to prevent 'drop off' when staff are busy or turnover. Partnerships incorporate and meet other identified objectives of both partners.	Open and honest discussions, face-face or by phone, that address concerns, issues and disputes as they arise. These are conducted face to face, on the phone if necessary, but never by email. Planning is directed towards a strong vision that is clearly articulated and agreed. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and stakeholder information sessions. Proactively share relevant client and case information within privacy legislation constraints.	Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen ACCO role and capacity.	Indicators of success are mutually agreed between partners and, where appropriate, jointly reported on. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes.	Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy. Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream services to create space for service innovation.	Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs.
Value for **process as integral** to support and enable partnership	Bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCO to express community needs and request support. ACCOs making clear their needs, perspective and vision for their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and the ways that mainstream partners can support. Introducing staffing structures and arrangements geared towards shared learning and relationship building. Ongoing time invested in personal relationships at all levels of partnership structures. Mainstream partner develops strong physical presence with ACCO partner and in the broader community, through, for example, regular phone calls, visits to ACCO office and	Open and honest discussions, working through the hard issues despite challenges. Partners don't 'dig in' and are prepared to let go of individual needs to achieve shared goals. Focus on formalising agreements to clarify commitments, roles, management structures and processes, and resource allocation. Policies and procedures incorporate partnership agreements and processes, as well as institutional knowledge of partnerships, to prevent 'drop off' when staff are busy or turnover. Partnerships incorporate and meet other identified objectives of both partners.	Consistent contact with the ACCO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Examples are regular visits to community, participation in community meetings/events and information sessions on partnership activities. Open and honest discussions, face-face or by phone, that address concerns, issues and disputes as they arise. These are conducted face to face, on the phone if necessary, but never by email. Planning is informal, flexible and ongoing, ensuring that the partnership is dynamic and responsive to needs and opportunities. Planning is directed towards a strong vision that is clearly articulated and agreed. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken	Allocate resources to partnership development and management processes. Develop funded facilitation roles that assist in brokering relationships, managing partnership structures and supporting partnership development, including within integrated service delivery models. Staff in ACCOs and culturally competent mainstream partners undertake facilitation roles that assist in incorporating ACCO perspective in partnership relationships and multi-partner structures. Longer term, flexible Government funding commitments and models.	Where an ACCO reports to a partner who is also a funder, the ACCO participates in developing relevant and not overly onerous reporting processes. Partners provide support to ACCOs for evaluation capacity development and data collection processes. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes.	Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream services to create space for service innovation.	Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements. Mainstream partners utilise and develop framework documents to describe and inform their approach to developing cultural competency, including Reconciliation Action Plans. This process includes input and support from ACCO partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Mainstream partners make recommendations and offers to ACCO partners in relation to training needs that make clear what they can provide. Staff of both partners work closely together and undertake mutual mentoring roles, exchanging skills and knowledge that contribute to the response to community needs.

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
	consultation with Elders and other community members. Including ACCOs from the start of a project or process. Upper level management leading by example, with conduct explicitly communicating to staff role and importance of partnership and its implications.		jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and stakeholder information sessions. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams.					
A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory	Bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCO to express community needs and request support. Mainstream partners open to applying their ideas, skills and resources in different and culturally appropriate ways of working.	Focus on formalising agreements to clarify commitments, roles, management structures and processes, and resource allocation. Partnerships incorporate and meet other identified objectives of both partners. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify opportunities, facilitate strategic discussions and enable partnership negotiation.	Consistent contact with the ACCO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Examples are regular visits to community, participation in community meetings/events and information sessions on partnership activities. Staff training is designed, delivered and/or undertaken jointly by staff of partner organisations, as are community and stakeholder information sessions. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams. Proactively share relevant client and case information within privacy legislation constraints.	Allocate resources to partnership development and management processes. Develop funded facilitation roles that assist in brokering relationships, managing partnership structures and supporting partnership development, including within integrated service delivery models. ACCOs and culturally competent mainstream organisations undertake facilitation roles that assist in incorporating ACCO perspective in partnership relationships and multi-partner structures. Funding for service delivery in partnership is pooled and flexible, enabling collaborative and creative response to community needs. Partners view resources as community resources for the benefit of children and families. Partners work together to determine how to allocate resources to achieve good outcomes. This includes resource sharing and transfer arrangements that strengthen ACCO role and capacity. Government children and family support programs specify and support roles for ACCOs and mainstream partners in a partnership model, where mainstream role is necessary. Integrated service delivery systems articulate the	Indicators of success are mutually agreed between partners and, where appropriate, jointly reported on. Where an ACCO reports to a partner who is also a funder, the ACCO participates in developing relevant and not overly onerous reporting processes. ACCO partners participate in the design of evaluation and review processes. Mainstream partners listen to and support the perspectives of ACCO partners on effective responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs. Partners provide support to ACCOs for evaluation capacity development and data collection processes.	Government listens and responds to service innovations developed and proposed by strong partnerships that include ACCO perspectives. Mainstream partners with significant broader influence represent 'on-the-ground' realities and perspectives of ACCO partners in policy debate. Mainstream partners listen to and support ACCO perspectives on effective responses to community needs. Partnerships include platforms for ongoing strategic discussions between partners and within broader committees, to identify and develop opportunities, inform one another, and strengthen innovation and advocacy.	Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Mainstream partners recognise that cultural differences require them to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements. Mainstream partner employs and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Mainstream partners utilise and develop framework documents to describe and inform their approach to developing cultural competency, including Reconciliation Action Plans. This process includes input and support from ACCO partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Mainstream partners have a commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Mainstream partners work with ACCOs to identify opportunities for staff training, mentoring and skills development in key areas of need ACCOs identify. Mainstream partners provide support for governance system development that promotes strong and autonomous governance structures that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership. Mainstream partner provides supports for obtaining sustainable funding that include: providing information, facilitating links; advocacy and promotion; gap funding; joint submissions and; support for developing submissions. Mainstream partners support transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Government and NGO peak bodies identify sector and geographical capacity gaps for ACCO child and family service delivery, and strategically address capacity gaps by supporting and enabling partnerships.

Principles of Good Practice Partnerships	Partnership Development		Partnership Management			Partnership Outcomes		
	Relationship Building	Negotiation and Agreements	Ongoing Partnership Management	Facilitation and Resourcing	Monitoring and Evaluation	Collective Innovation and Advocacy	Cultural Competency	Capacity Building
				significant role of ACCOs in leading culturally appropriate service responses to community needs, and incorporate resources and timelines that enable their effective participation.			communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs.	
Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approach may not be the most appropriate or effective	Bringing ideas, skills and resources to the table, but waiting for ACCO to express community needs and request support. Willingness of mainstream partners to invest and engage in issues important to the local community, expressed through the ACCO. Mainstream partners open to applying their ideas, skills and resources in different and culturally appropriate ways of working.	Mainstream partners listen to and incorporate perspectives and interests of ACCOs and their communities in agreements. This includes recognising ACCO's important role to identify, communicate and respond to community needs. Agreements are not overly prescriptive, but allow for sufficient flexibility and responsiveness to arising needs.	Consistent contact with the ACCO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Examples are regular visits to community, participation in community meetings/events and information sessions on partnership activities. Staffing arrangements including, for example, co-location, secondment, shared staff and mirrored staff teams.	Funding for service delivery in partnership is pooled and flexible, enabling collaborative and creative response to community needs.	Evaluation processes acknowledge and incorporate Aboriginal cultural perspectives on evaluation including, for example, qualitative feedback and storytelling approaches.	Government departments provide resources and support for open and flexible partnership development between ACCOs and mainstream services to create space for service innovation. Government listens and responds to service innovations developed and proposed by strong partnerships that include ACCO perspectives.	Staff of mainstream partners undertake cultural awareness training relevant to the local culture/s. They do this with direction, guidance and/or participation of their ACCO partners. Mainstream partners recognise that cultural differences require them to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Staff-sharing, secondment and co-location arrangements. ACCOs provide cultural advice services to support mainstream partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Mainstream partners utilise and develop framework documents to describe and inform their approach to developing cultural competency, including Reconciliation Action Plans. This process includes input and support from ACCO partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Mainstream partners have a commitment to self-determination and identify what this means for their practice; including supporting and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to lead the response to community needs. Mutual mentoring occurs between upper level management through regular discussions, observation and interactions.	Mainstream partners support transfer of leadership, resources and responsibility to ACCOs for service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.