

Event "Men, Women and Community – Partnerships" Indigenous Family Violence Forum (Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research)

Date Tuesday, 2 May 2006

Time 8.30am

Location Windmill Hotel and Reception Centre, Bruce Highway, North Mackay

Topic ***How the Department of Child Safety defines and implements partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities***

Presenter Joann Schmider
Director, Indigenous Support and Development Branch

Please check acknowledgements and order

SLIDE 1 - Title

In line with our protocols, I acknowledge the traditional owners of country here in Mackay and surrounding areas,

- I acknowledge elders in the room,
- and I acknowledge all child protection partners I have personally connected with since taking up this Queensland role 12 months ago such as Mackay AICCA, Galang Place, Blackboys.

I am well pleased for the first time in 25 years to formally recognise Jackie Huggins, AM as a leader, colleague, friend and my sister.

I acknowledge distinguished guests, and all the participants in this forum.

I pay deep respect to all those of you, the women and men who bring their commitment, concern and skill to the frontline of domestic violence work.

I also recognise the community, ngo and government workers who sustain those in the frontline by providing research and policy advice, practice guides, resourcing, support and advocacy.

What you have in the domestic and family violence arena - this mix and range of frontline and support people, community, ngo and government workers such as yourselves here –

is similar to the frontline and support services challenges of working in child safety.

It is a good lens for the child protection system we are in the process of building in Queensland.

And so I appreciate the invitation to me from the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research to talk about **how the Department of Child Safety defines and implements partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

as part of your topic around **the meaning and practice of government and community partnerships in relation to Indigenous family violence.**

SLIDE 2 - The Child Protection Reform Agenda

You are already aware of the major reform process the Queensland Government is undertaking in child protection.

Some 22 of the 110 Blueprint recommendations focus on specific Indigenous child protection actions, and all the reform, all the recommendations, were to collectively ensure that service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, their families and their carers is three things:

1. Culturally appropriate,
2. Accessible, and
3. Responsive to individual needs.

My Branch, and the Department, has been taking its reform work directly from these 110 recommendations. I won't go into that today but if you want further information I'd be happy to provide some.

Those same reports and implementation Blueprint talked about the need for, as it quotes on the slide....

“Building strong and enduring partnerships between non-government and government sectors across the primary, secondary, and tertiary care continuum to better address and fund identified needs”.

Now I come with 25 years Indigenous services background in government, where the focus of my energy has been about getting government to listen more strongly to, and take into account, Indigenous interests.

And in the education, social and economic policy fields I've worked in, those interests have been mainly articulated by community based representative and advocacy Indigenous structures.

So now I've come more deeply into the social services sector, and early up, I've identified a major challenge. It seems to me this sector's terminology about "government and non-government" is problematic – particularly in the Indigenous arena. You may have strong views about this – this point I want to share with you – and I invite you to talk widely about it.

I advocate that we should be clearly identifying three parties to partnerships approaches.

SLIDE 3 – circles - Partners in development

And that is,

1. government
2. ngos – both those who are contracted by government to deliver services as well as those that take on advocacy roles, and
3. community in its own right – including the men, women and children; and individuals, families and groups – that make up our many communities across the state.

Let me emphasise that advocating attention to three parties is not an easy road. I have caused a few ripples.

Ad lib with the diagram

- Governments and NGOs
 - Governments world wide are increasingly looking for creative and sustainable ways to ensure appropriate services at local levels, including contracting ngos to deliver services.
 - NGOs are challenged with seeking to maintain their links with communities, as well as be professional service delivery and advocacy structures.

- Yet experience provides substantial evidence that when you are looking to create change in society – the most appropriate, and durable, and impacting solutions come from within communities. By partnering with communities there is a greater capacity to achieve community development through self-determination, involvement and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in child safety process and decision.

I often refer to the DV area as clear example of the importance of recognising three distinct parties at the table.

Ad lib

Family violence has become a strong movement – it works, not by government services delivery - but by the combined effort of community consciousness, ngo work and government support.

Evidence is strong that child Abuse and neglect in our communities has direct correlation with that of family violence. Addressing family violence will go along way in addressing the abuse of our children.

But the DV field offers more than than....Indigenous child safety can learn lots from the Domestic Violence strategies and the Department of Child Safety and Government can have a field which to look at objectively and appreciate what's needed and the length of time needed to build the community, ngo and government partnerships to progress child safety and what's essentially a societal values field.

This diagram is intended to carry this as a strong message within my department – that we deliberately intend distinct relationships between government, ngos and communities in working together to address the child protection challenge.

Another point I want to emphasise – and again you already well know it – is about the relationship, or the partnerships approach between the three parties.....

The difficulty of getting a shared view about what partnerships means and how to embed the concept of partnerships across government practice, let alone with NGOs and communities.

I would like to share some background concepts with you here. Please note these are not formal Departmental policy – rather, they come from some previous work I did looking at how government can

- support community capacity and
- strong ngos centred within and driven by community
- overall strong development within Indigenous local communities.

Let's have a look at a couple of slides....

SLIDE 4 – all green – Traditional approaches

Over the last thirty years, communities have been serviced in a top-down approach.

The political government sets policies and provides funds to its agencies – the various and often siloed government departments.

These agencies provide funds to and set rules for non-government organisations delivering services to communities on behalf of government.

The people in a community tend to be passive recipients of these services.

One of the anomalies is that the ngos started out being community interest groups advocating better situations in their particular interest field or local community.

It is now commonly acknowledged in Indigenous affairs that 30 years of program and service delivery by government agencies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has not had the impact that government anticipated or expected.

One of the key reasons underlying this lack of impact is the quality of connections between service providers and the individuals, families and communities they serve (much to the frustration of both parties involved).

***SLIDE 5 – green and yellow –
Moving towards partners in development***

Today governments and development organisations worldwide advocate the need for local participation in the development of community programs and service provision.

- The World Bank has what it calls “community driven development”.
- The international Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has produced a range of material on government / community relations and promotes what it calls an “Active Participation Model”.
- The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is one of the world’s leading development agencies. Among the principles it has identified as keys to Effective Development in recipient countries are ‘Local Ownership’ and ‘Stronger Partnerships’.

Evidence shows that development is more effective and sustainable when local people have identified their needs and contributed to the design, implementation and evaluation of the programs impacting on their lives.

In looking at a development approach to getting effective partnerships and sustainable outcomes, within child safety I am looking at 3 areas of work:

1. Promoting the capacity of our individuals, families and communities to advocate for and take control over the promotion of their own wellbeing and overcoming their disadvantages for themselves; as well as
2. Building the capacity of ngo service delivery organisations and government agencies to engage with individuals, families and communities – men, women and children – in participatory and mutually developmental ways, and
3. Harnessing internal and cross agency, and even cross government effort.

So that in the new environment.....

SLIDE 6 - Actualising Partnerships

Individuals, families and communities increasingly get involved in and effect beneficial community participation in, and control over, the services that are being delivered.

Communities, ngos and government work together across policy and program development, and services provision.

Deliberate effort is put into the relationships between parties.

And the relations are about

- shared concerns and shared responsibility,
- pooling expertise and resources,
- and about valuing the other parties in the process.

In engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, service providers will need to move beyond the provision of information and even consultation, to “involvement” and “collaboration” which encompasses joint work and shared decision-making. If efforts are not made to move to these higher levels of participation and partnership, the engagement will be less effective.

SLIDE 7 – Shared Responsibility

There will always be a role for (and an obligation to provide) service delivery. It is part of the normal function of government to provide certain services such as education, health care, essential services and others as means of fulfilling citizens' rights.

The way in which these are delivered changes with the adoption of a partnerships strategy.

Rather than the traditional top-down approach to service delivery – with government setting priorities, funding allocations, policies and regulations etc – more participative and partnership approaches emerge in which government, community and other stakeholders are involved in an open and equal dialogue and build community sustainability.

Thus the top-down approach of government and the bottom-up approach of capacity building inform each other in a virtuous cycle of service delivery.

SLIDE 8 - Mission

There are two Indigenous goals if you like for the Department of Child Safety.

We are committed, in partnership with Indigenous and mainstream stakeholders, to:

1. Addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the statutory child protection system; and
2. Ensuring that Indigenous children and young people who enter the statutory system receive the best available culturally appropriate services.

SLIDE 9 – Stats

It is a sobering fact that children and young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families continue to be significantly over-represented in the child protection system.

- Indigenous children and youth make up around 6.3 % of the state's children and young people, yet make up some 14 % of notifications.
- Indigenous children and young people also represent 24 % of all children in care, although it has been estimated that this is as high as 60 to 70 % in north and far north Queensland.

SLIDE 10 – Map

The Department of Child Safety is committed to turning these figures around.

Talk about map

I'm pleased to share with you that in the Department of Child Safety's new Strategic Plan for 2006-2009, a specific strategic intent has been added to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

I won't go into detail here, but again, if you would like to know more about what we intend this and next year, I would be happy to provide more information.

The strategies to support the Indigenous over-representation strategic focus recognise the key importance of partnerships, and strong working relationships between

- the department,
- other government agencies;
- Indigenous and mainstream organisations; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and mainstream, communities.

Together, we bring

- the responsibilities of government and
- the expert cultural knowledge of Indigenous communities and their organisations, and
- the expert practice knowledge of ngos

in working systematically to drive down the Indigenous over-representation across child protection.

SLIDE 11 – Child safety and family support continuum

It's useful just now to have a look at what the child protection system involves.

This diagram shows the child safety and family support continuum that we are promoting in the Indigenous arena.

Of course, what the professionals know of as primary, secondary and tertiary services goes beyond this continuum and I've got a good SNAICC overview if you're interested.

When I have to describe it simply, I say the statutory child protection system is about

1. making informed decisions on whether children have to be removed,
2. then placing them in the best possible care in line with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle,
3. wrapping around culturally appropriate support and healing services, and
4. reunifying them with their families.

SLIDE 12 – Partnership Strategies

So the potential partnerships we promote are many.

At the family unit level, in line with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle, the department is recruiting relative, kinship and foster carers to ensure there are enough carers to help care for Indigenous children who come into the child protection system.

At a local level, the department works with Indigenous families and communities on a day-to-day basis through our 46 Child Safety Service Centres and frontline officers.

We also conducting a recruitment campaign to increase the number and involvement of Indigenous people as professional staff across all levels of the organisation, to ensure we can provide Indigenous families with culturally appropriate and sensitive services.

At an organisational level, we have increased working with non-government organisations to further strengthen the child protection system.

On one hand, we are entrenching service standard requirements that **all ngos** have to demonstrate their ability to provide cultural competent services....this has been a big step for the Department.

On the other hand, the Department's child safety legislation mandates the deliberate engagement of Indigenous networks external to the department in child protection.

The department is required, through the legislation, to work directly with external Indigenous networks – to access appropriate cultural advice about the child and their family, and the child’s community – whenever Indigenous cases are brought to the attention of the child protection system. This process is referred to as the Recognised Entity function.

Currently there are 25 Indigenous Recognised Entities throughout the state, and last weekend the department advertised substantial funding to provide further Recognised Entity services, in line with the recommendations contained in the March 2004 Blueprint report.

Last weekend’s ads gave notice about funding available in:

- Logan North, West and South
- Browns Plains North and South
- Gold Coast North, West and South, and
- Ipswich North and South, and Goodna.

In regard to Cairns, Tsv, Mcky, Rocky, Bne and some other locations - a further \$6 million will be allocated through a select tender process involving services identified as having the capacity and community support to deliver the services needed.

In locations like Mount Isa, Toowoomba and the South West, the Cape and Torres Strait, development processes are also underway with communities. In the meantime, interim arrangements are in place in these areas.

All Recognised Entities approved through the funding allocations are required as one of **two formal outputs** they’re contracted for, to engage across the diversity of the Indigenous communities in their local areas to ensure community engagement in and knowledge of local child protection issues.

The network of Recognised Entities and the services they provide is the clearest measure indicating how the Department of Child Safety defines and implements partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

But it's important to recognise partnerships must go beyond Recognised Entity services.

In addition to our work with Recognised Entities, the department works with

- other Indigenous service delivery organisations such as placement services like Blackboys, and professional therapeutic and support services like Galang Place.....and we need to do much more to increase the involvement of such Indigenous services across the state;
- and the department works with other non-Indigenous organisations who provide services in child protection and related areas such as health, housing and domestic violence.

For instance, the Centre has been contracted todevelop curriculum, and Heather is a member of the Dept of Child Safety's dv working group.

On a government wide level, intra-government cooperation continues to be a key focus for our department.

Our Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) system is a prime example of this. The SCAN system brings together professionals from the Department of Child Safety and core members including

- the Queensland Police Service,
- Queensland Health,
- Department of Education and the Arts and
- recognised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entities.

These multi-disciplinary teams are located throughout Queensland, and meet regularly to make and implement recommendations on the child protection cases in that locality – recommendations to best meet the needs of children who have been harmed or who are at risk of harm.

The SCAN system is yet another example of a range of government agencies and non-government organisations working together to achieve better outcomes for children.

In addition, the department continues to participate in a range of child protection forums and liaise with other agencies at the state and federal government level, including

- the Child Safety Directors' Network
- Indigenous Peak Body
- State-wide Partnerships Taskforce
- Qld Government's Partnerships Queensland Indigenous affairs framework and
- State offices of Aust Government agencies and

- National levels - Australian Government's Indigenous affairs regime and FACSIA, and with Indigenous NGO SNAICC and the National Indigenous Council who talked earlier this day at this conference

At whole of government state level, I'm also pleased that the Govt's Queensland Child Protection strategy 2006-2009 provides the strategic direction and the policy platform on which to build and enhance partnerships across government agencies, and between government and non-government services and the community to meet the challenge of achieving better outcomes for children and families.

This is vitally important in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with access to housing, health services, education, transport, child care, community and welfare services, employment and income support being important ways in which families can be supported to protect and care for their children.

SLIDE 12 – Inverted triangle

This **third last** diagram shows the relationship between the Department of Child Safety's responsibility to provide better services to Indigenous children and young people in the child protection system, against the **wider picture** of what the Blueprint identified as the critical need to reduce the over-representation of Indigenous children in the system in the first place.

It demonstrates the relationship between the Department and our NGO and community partners, with the whole-of-government and dare I say, whole-of-community approaches, needed to support functional and resilient families and communities.

While the term partnerships, when associated with child protection, implies listening to all points of view on child protection, within the context of the broader campaign against domestic violence, the Department of Child Safety has as its priority the **safety of children and young people**.

It is through the delivery of child protection services and the strengthening of the department's stakeholder networks, backed up by the specialist support of the Indigenous Support and Development Branch, that the child protection system is reaching out to protect vulnerable families, and most particularly, children and young people at risk.

Slide 14: Pormpuraaw

This slide is a description of a model of service delivery in the remote Aboriginal community of Pormpuraaw.

Representatives of Pormpuraaw attended a community engagement forum in Cairns in August 2005 to discuss ways of addressing the abuse of child and the establishment of a local Recognised Entity.

This is a community drawn picture showing how partnerships that are conceptualised and built between government and community and community's organisations can systematically address child abuse and family violence, and child and family well-being in local communities.

Final Slide

This overview has covered the partnerships the Department of Child Safety is seeking to build in child safety in relation to Indigenous over-representation

A) BETWEEN

- Communities – including individuals, families and groups; at local and zonal levels
- Organisations –
 - particularly organisations that are closely tied with their communities such as what Recognised Entities need to be and with community healing services;
 - with other service delivery Indigenous organisations such as placement services, professional therapeutic and support services, and family reunification services;
 - with the very many non-Indigenous organisations providing child protection services to Indigenous children and families; and
 - with the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous services working with Indigenous communities in related areas such as health, housing, domestic violence etc
- Local, state and Australian government agencies (and of course, within the Department of Child Safety)

B) WITH

- Child safety specific services ie
 - Like Recognised Entity, placement, therapeutic and support; and family reunification services
- AND related networks impacting Indigenous child safety and child and family well-being eg.
 - Like those of you working in family support, education, health, housing, legal services and Indigenous affairs generally

C) AT

- Local levels everywhere across Queensland, the 7 Zones of the department, at State and National levels even to the National Indigenous Council

Partnership approaches with the stakeholder networks in domestic violence at all these levels are particularly relevant to child safety.

I know it's been a complex presentation.

Many thanks to the Centre for your invitation, and to you as the audience for allowing me to share this information and my thoughts with you.....

I trust it also proves useful.

-ENDS-