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# Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter *Building better relationships.. for kids*



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**Family Support Newcastle**  
*your family, our community*



Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation



**Social Services  
Hunter-Manning**  
DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE



# Why we formed...

Very high rates of children in care

Very high rates of Aboriginal children in care (NSW FACS, 2014 & AIHW, 2014)

Low levels of family inclusion (Thorpe, 2008)

High levels of supervised family contact with uncertain expectations of behaviour (Triseliotis, 2011)

A changing policy & legislative context in NSW (NSW FACS, 2013)

Knowledge that parents & family experienced exclusion, blame and stereotyping in the child protection & out of home care system

# A practice forum on family inclusion

“How can we support parents & family to have better relationships with their children in out of home care?”



# Forum outcomes

- Individual practice change is needed
- Partnerships between carers, family and the service system
- Different models of out of home care and **earlier** intervention
- Opportunities for innovation
- Systemic change



## *Voices of parents and family are crucial*

### Ongoing work of FISH

- Information, advocacy & resources
- Carer & worker training & support to make change
- Social advocacy eg: senate inquiry
- FISH meetings & collaboration
- Research



# Practice and Research seminar 2015

- What is family inclusion?
- What is family inclusive practice from the perspective of parents & carers & what can be learned from this?
- Voices from research, parents, carers and practice.

# *More than family contact*

Family inclusive practice is about all aspects of a case plan and a child's life. It is not fragmented.

Promoting ongoing parenting role

Non formulaic – there is more than one way to parent children





# Genuine Relationships

- Informality of relationships – getting to know one another
- Carers & parents should meet as early as possible
- Workers – role model & provide structure & support for carers and parents to build a relaxed relationship
- The relationship with workers is crucial to bring about positive change (Reimer, 2013)
- Trust and hope

# Respectful relationships

“Little things are the big things.. Having a normal everyday parenting voice”

“It is a scary thing at the beginning but we are all the same, we are all human”

“Be open and willing to listen”

# Power, equity & authority

“Up until the kids were 7 everything was run by DoCS & OOHC agency.”

“ I only just started to get involved in case planning...I didn't even know what a case plan was...after 4 years!”

“I didn't know I had any rights”

“Everyone wanted me to stop, wanted me to fail...”

# Language & practical support

- Use plain language that is used by parents and family.
- Develop genograms and other visual tools
- Use language that respects the expertise and ongoing role of parents & family
- Provide practical support linked to family inclusion

# Flexible & informal contact

- Ask - Why supervise?
- Practical support when needed

*“it’s become obvious he doesn’t know who I am”*

*Phonecalls, text messages, facebook, siblings, sleepovers at grandmothers etc etc..”*

*“A child can live in care & have love for their family as well”*



# Innovation & systemic change

Aimed at family preservation, restoration & long term care  
Advocacy to bring about system change & to help parents negotiate the system.

Leadership – from parents and family including peer support & a range of family decision making practices

New models of care including fostering the family (Brennan and Crowe, 2002)

## *Building better relationships... for kids*

If we are better at family inclusion we can improve outcomes for children & young people in out of home care



# So what is family inclusion?

Family inclusion is the active & meaningful participation of parents and family in the lives of children. It requires open, warm and trusting relationships aimed at building equity with workers & carers. It is underpinned by respect & trust.

*“The least amount of judging we can do... the better off we are”*



***“Kids need their parents in their lives... one way or another”***

**Building Better Relationships – Report on the Family Inclusion Practice Forum, Newcastle, 2014.**

<http://www.lwb.org.au/who-we-are/publications-and-resources/out-of-home-care/>

Or at:

[www.newcastle.edu.au/fac](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/fac)



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