

Darwin ACCA Aboriginal Foster Carer and Kinship Carer Support Program

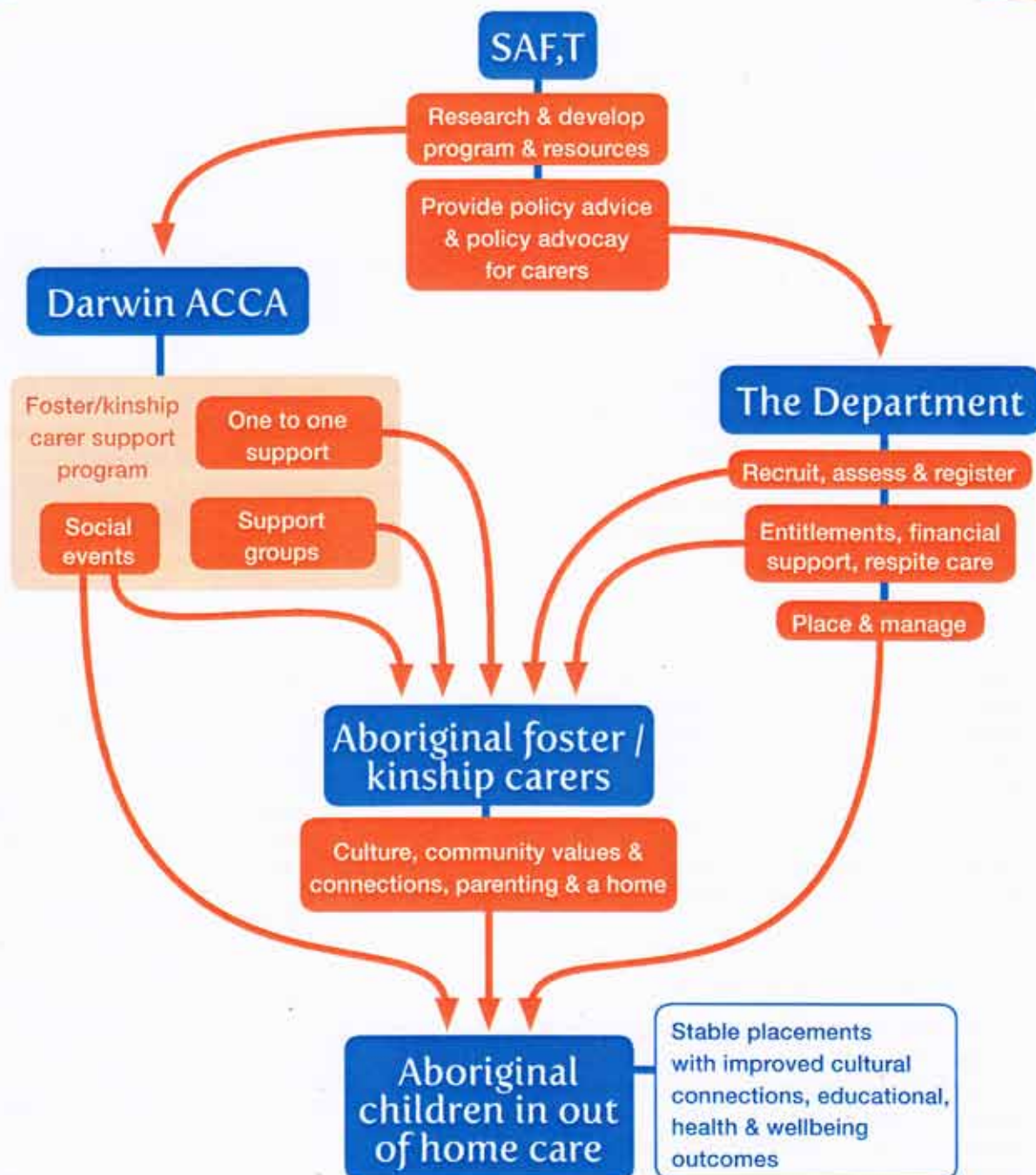


Diagram 1: What would the Darwin ACCA Aboriginal Foster Carer and Kinship Carer Support Program do?

- Darwin ACCA would provide culturally appropriate one to one support to Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.
- Darwin ACCA would run culturally appropriate support groups for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers. This could include social events for carers and children in care.
- This program would:
 - reduce stress on carers
 - help retain carers
 - ensure stable placements and improved outcomes for children

Background

Board of Inquiry* Recommendation 60

That Northern Territory Families and Children develops a kinship care unit to assist with the recruitment, assessment, registration, support and training of kinship and specific carers and that consideration is given to progressively outsourcing these functions to local ACCAs as their capacity is developed.

Foster care

Foster care is overnight care in a private home for a child who is living apart from his or her parents. The care is authorised and carers are reimbursed by the NT Department of Children and Families (the Department). The Department or a non-government organisation provides the foster carer with training before a child is placed with the family, and supervises the placement.¹

Kinship care and 'family way' care

Kinship care is also known as relative care. Kinship care is like foster care except care is provided by relatives of the child (not the parents) or someone well known to the child or family.² Kinship carers are assessed and approved to care only for the specific child or children to which they are related.³

Other care arrangements include 'family way' placements. These are agreements between the Department and a family about moving a child, who may or may not be subject to a child protection order, to stay with different relatives.⁴

Kinship care is seen as being better for Aboriginal children and young people than foster care because it promotes positive cultural identity, leads to fewer placement disruptions, more reunifications with parents and fewer behavioural problems for the child.^{5,6} Kinship care has also been identified as a way to heal trauma, pass down culture and build individual and community strength and resilience.⁷

Kinship carers get reimbursements if the child is subject to a child protection order. 'Family way' carers may get some help with set-up costs, but they are not eligible for ongoing payments.⁸

Kinship carers are usually asked to take a child immediately, do not receive training before placement⁹ and receive less placement support from the Department, or sometimes no support at all.

Support and training needs of foster and kinship carers

"Carers who receive good support or training are more likely to be retained as carers and may facilitate the recruitment of new carers. Carers who are appropriately trained and resourced develop skills, knowledge and confidence in their caring role. This leads to improved outcomes for children in their care."¹⁰

As acknowledged by the Board of Inquiry all parents need support. Community members reported to the Board of Inquiry that one of their greatest needs was help with parenting their children.¹¹

Aboriginal foster and kinship carers have greater support needs than other families. The children in their care are likely to have greater psychological, emotional, behavioural or health needs due to traumatic experiences before care.¹²

The 2010 Board of Inquiry found: 'A clear theme is the lack of support and respect carers feel that they receive from Department staff as well as problems in dealing with bureaucratic systems which they believe do not meet their needs or those of the children they look after.'¹³

Both foster and kinship carers find the payment system difficult to understand. Payments vary according to the child's age and needs, the type of care and if other government departments are involved such as Education or Disability.¹⁴

Carers often have to advocate for a child to have their needs met and carers need assistance in this role.

Aboriginal kinship carers have particular support needs and have identified some difficulties as: lack of respite care, financial problems, difficulties coping with challenging behaviours of children and young people and managing relationships with the child's parents, overcrowding, and lack of support from the Department or non-government organisation.¹⁵

Submissions to the Board of Inquiry said training is often delayed and that the Department training based on the 'Our Carers for Our Kids' is inadequate.¹⁶

Training needs to be ongoing through the whole placement to reflect changing needs.

* Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the NT, 2010

The situation today

How many children?

At 30 June 2010 in the NT there were:

- 406 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. Of these:
 - 124 were placed with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or kin;
 - 58 were placed with another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander care giver; and
 - 224 were not placed with relatives or kin or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander care giver.
- 64% (260) were in foster care;
- 22% (89) in kinship care;
- 18.5% (75) in 'other home based care' (which includes 'family way' care.)¹⁷

How many carers?

- As at 30 June 2010 in the NT there were 140 foster care households. There is no published information about the number of kinship care or 'family way' carers.
- There is a high turnover of foster carers. In 2009–10 there were 138 households which started providing foster care and 112 households which stopped.¹⁸

Note: This data is the most up to date currently available but the numbers of carers and children in out of home care in the NT now are estimated to be higher. New data will be published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in January 2012. Anecdotal advice is that the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care in the Northern Territory is now over 600.

Geographic spread

Published data covers the whole NT and so we cannot look at the number of out of home care households in the different regions.

Foster and Kinship Care Management

All NT foster and kinship carers are recruited trained and assessed by the Department except for Life Without Barriers carers who are recruited, assessed and trained by that agency.

Foster Care NT (peak body)

The Board of Inquiry recommended that the Department "adequately funds [the peak body] Foster Care NT to ensure that the organisation is able to develop an effective monitoring and support role for foster carers and to assist in the provision of foster care recruitment, training and advocacy within the Department."¹⁹

Foster Care NT's website does not include anything about its cultural competency or specific initiatives for Aboriginal carers. As an outcome of the Inquiry Foster Care NT was funded in mid 2011 to develop a foster carer peer support program called F.A.S.T (Foster Carer Advocacy and Support Team). F.A.S.T is a team of specially trained local foster carers who have volunteered to provide support and advice and advocate on behalf of other foster carers. Foster Care NT has appointed three F.A.S.T co-ordinators, a manager and administration officer and is in the process of selecting the voluntary FAST delegates to train as foster carer peer support workers. An Indigenous Support Worker will be appointed in Alice Springs.

According to Foster Care NT (conversation with co-ordinator Annette Murphy on 21 November 2011) the peer support program is designed for all foster carers and registered kinship carers including Aboriginal carers, although she was not aware of any Aboriginal carers currently involved with the program.

Interestingly, the program has been modelled on the F.A.S.T program of Foster Care Queensland and in Queensland there are also Aboriginal Foster Carer support programs run by ACCAs for example Indigenous Family and Child Support Service (IFACSS). There is clearly scope for an ACCA program to run alongside the NT Foster Care program.

Proposed program outline

Program objective (diagram 2)

The Darwin ACCA Aboriginal foster and kinship carer support program's objective would be to provide a specialised, culturally appropriate, program to support and train Aboriginal carers in a way that honours their role in the lives of Aboriginal children, embeds the strengths of Aboriginal people's culture, community values and child rearing practices,

and acknowledges the disadvantaged material circumstances that characterise many Aboriginal people's lives. In the short to medium term, carers would continue to be recruited and assessed by the Department and the placements of children would be made and managed by the Department.

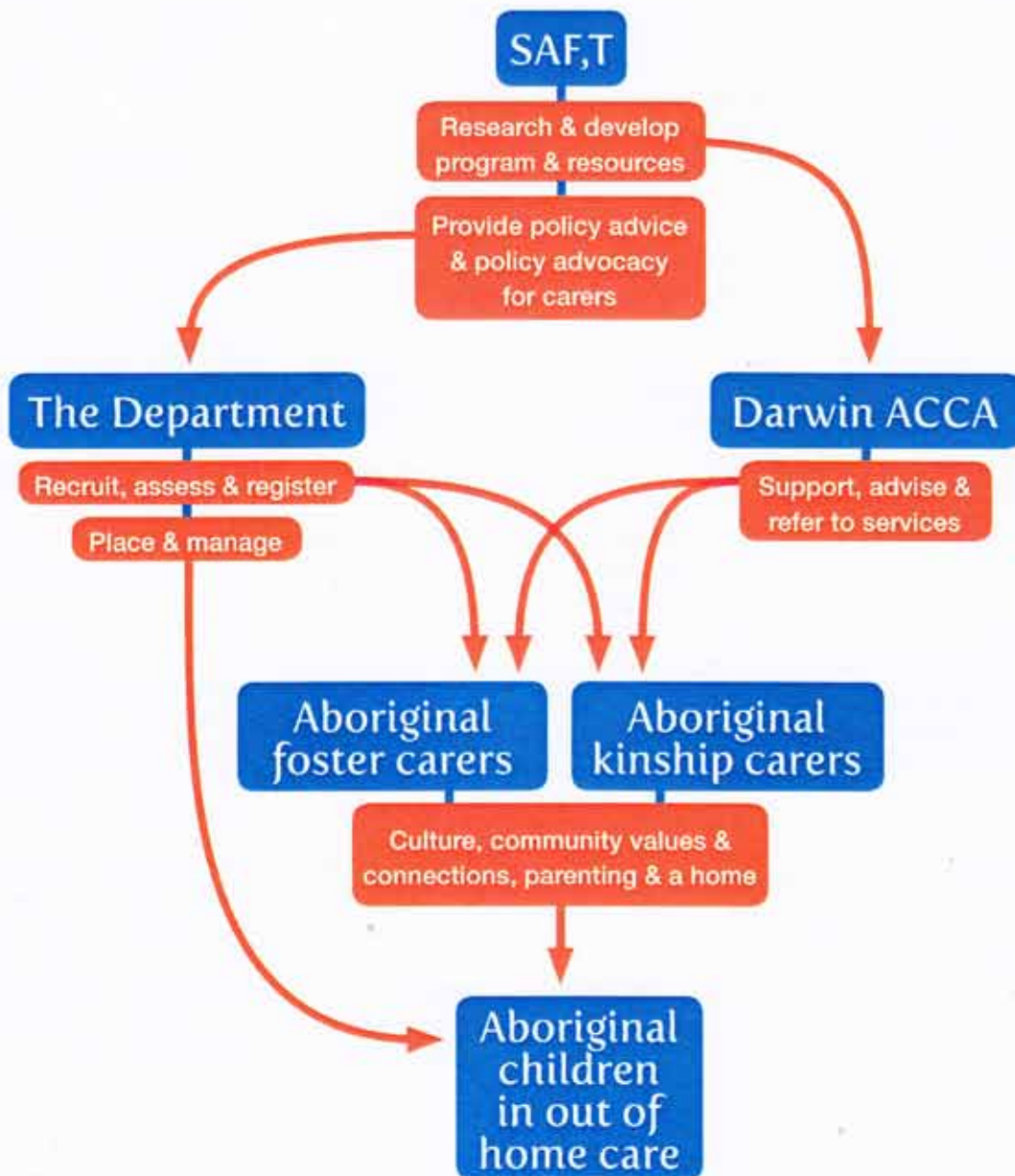


Diagram 2: The role of SAFT and the Darwin ACCA in supporting Aboriginal foster and kinship carers

Program elements

There are two broad work areas for staff in this program, both are critical to empowering carers, reducing carer stress and retaining carers and thus ensuring stable placements for children.

1 Culturally appropriate foster and kinship carer support groups (diagram 3)

Running culturally appropriate support groups to empower Aboriginal carers and help them feel less isolated through:

- promoting unity,
- providing information to carers about the child protection system, their rights, the rights of the children in their care and the rights of families,
- knowledge sharing and skill building about working with the bureaucracy,
- providing culturally appropriate information and support on parenting topics (eg. behaviour management and how to help children deal with the effects of trauma on their health and well being),
- referral to family support services.

Foster and kinship carer support groups may also provide Aboriginal cultural and community connections for the children. Support groups could run social events involving children (eg. barbecues, at which children could strengthen their community connections).

Support groups would be run for carers on an ongoing basis with discussion and information on different topics at each meeting. This may include expert guest speakers, eg. a Berry Street speaker on *Yarning up on Trauma*.

Carer support groups can also facilitate connections between carers outside the support group time to help carers feel less isolated. A successful strategy in NSW is that when a carer meets a departmental staff member to discuss an issue, they are accompanied and supported by another carer from their support group.



Diagram 3: The role of support groups for Aboriginal foster / kinship carers and Aboriginal children in out of home care.

2 Culturally appropriate one to one support for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers (diagram 4)

One to one support could be provided to Aboriginal carers by phone and through regular visits (if required and within agreed travelling distance). The support provided would include:

- linking carers to general family support services,
- providing carers with skills in dealing with the Department and assisting with communication problems between the carer and the Department,
- advocating with the Department on behalf of carers when necessary to ensure carers receive their entitlements, and;

- referring carers and facilitating practical support services for carers (eg. respite care, extra furniture, household goods and financial support).

A culturally appropriate tool for assessing the carers' need for support should be developed. This could be a Northern Territory version of the Winangay Assessment tool (see <http://winangay.com>) which uses plain English questions in a flexible and informal format for conversational interviews with existing kinship carers. The Winangay tool uses a series of pictorial cards to rate strengths and concerns and develop a joint action plan to support the family and improve outcomes for Aboriginal children.

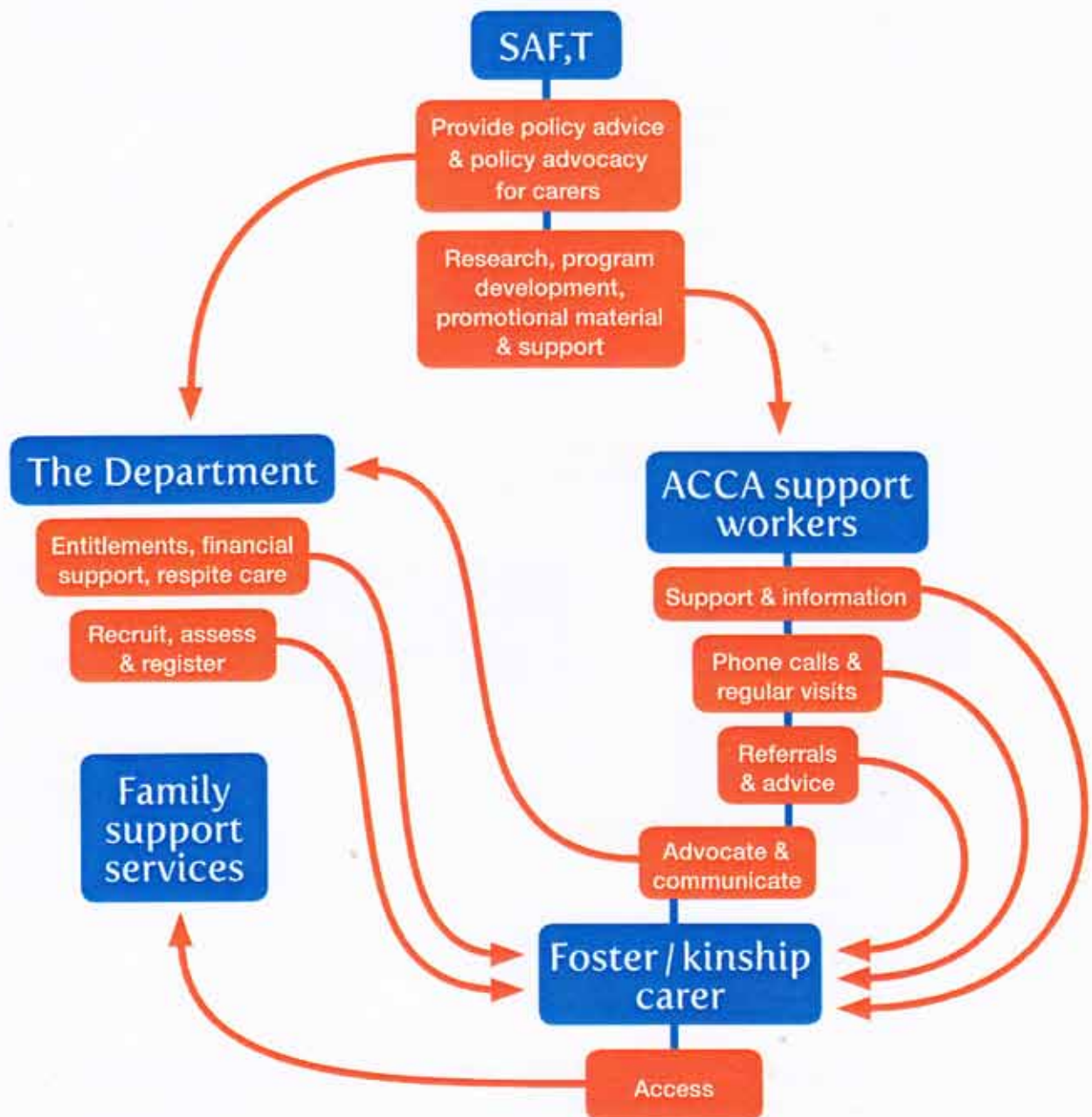


Diagram 4: The role of SAFT and the Darwin ACCA in providing culturally appropriate one to one support for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.

Program set up*

Stage 1 (first year)

- **Phone support:** Provide a 1800 free call telephone based support service for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers from the Darwin ACCA office.
- **Support groups:** Run Aboriginal foster and kinship carer support groups at the Darwin ACCA office.
- **Staff requirements:** 1–2 staff (initial requirement)
- **Other requirements (to be developed and organised for the Darwin ACCA by SAF,T):**
 - a database to record details of the carers;
 - a risk management plan;
 - office space for staff;
 - a meeting place for the support groups (could be in the 'cultural sanctuary' – see 'Cultural care program paper' for details);
 - investigation of the Winangay support tool to develop an NT version.

Stage 2 (2–3 years)

Employ more staff to:

- run support groups in Aboriginal communities;
- supplement the telephone support service with home visits to Aboriginal foster and kinship carers;
- develop and deliver training. This could include cultural awareness training for non-Aboriginal foster and kinship carers in partnership with the Darwin ACCA cultural care program;
- culturally appropriate education and awareness programs to encourage more Aboriginal foster and kinship carers.

Stage 3 (down the track)

Provide a recruitment and assessment program for Aboriginal foster and kinship carers based on a culturally appropriate assessment tool.

Aboriginal foster and kinship carer programs in other jurisdictions

There are several examples of Aboriginal kinship and foster carer assessment programs in other jurisdictions. All started small. Some details are listed below.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) MELBOURNE, VIC

VACCA's Extended care Program provides:

- access to a member of the VACCA Extended Care Program 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- supervision and support from Extended Care Caseworker;
- frequent visits and regular phone contact;
- 21 nights paid respite per year;
- organised activities for children and young people;
- a comprehensive training program.

www.vacca.org/_literature.../Foster_Carer_Information_Booklet

Yorganop PERTH, WA

Yarning about Kids with Yorganop Carers provides Indigenous-specific training program for general and kinship carers

www.yorganop.org.au/carerTraining.html

Winangay Resources (an Aboriginal company) MAYS HILL NSW

Winangay Resources Aboriginal Kinship Care Assessment Tool for existing Aboriginal kinship carers

<http://winangay.com>

Indigenous Family and Child Support Service (IFACSS) BRISBANE, QLD

IFACSS provides comprehensive support service for kinship and general carers

ifacss.org.au/kinship-and-carers/

* Aboriginal services across Australia are pressured to provide more services than they are funded for and are asked for more assistance for their specialist knowledge more than their funding covers. This can lead to other funded

work suffering and to worker stress and burnout.²⁰

Good program design and management involves being clear about the program scope and operating within these

boundaries including setting targets for the geographical area that will be covered, the number of carers that will be supported and the number and duration of support and training groups that will be run.

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. *Child Protection Australia 2009-10*. Child welfare series no. 51. Cat. no. CWS 39. Canberra: AIHW. p57
- 2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. p57
- 3 Northern Territory Government 2010. *Growing them Strong, Together: Promoting the safety and well being of the Northern Territory's children*. Report of the Board of Inquiry Into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory 2010. M. Bamblett, H. Bath, and R. Roseby, Northern Territory Government Darwin. p350
- 4 Northern Territory Government 2010. p331
- 5 Northern Territory Government 2010. p357
- 6 Marilyn McHugh. *A Framework of Practice for Implementing a Kinship Care Program*. SPRC UNSW 2009.
- 7 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Co-operative Ltd. *Discussion Paper Aboriginal Kinship Care Program 2011* (unpublished)
- 8 Northern Territory Government 2010. p331
- 9 Northern Territory Government 2010. p351
- 10 Higgins, J.R. and Butler, N. (2007). *Assessing, training and recruiting Indigenous carers. 'Promising Practices in out-of-Home care for aboriginal and torres strait islander carers, children and Young People' (booklet 2)*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. p 5
- 11 Northern Territory Government 2010. p17
- 12 Northern Territory Government 2010. p322
- 13 Northern Territory Government 2010. p352
- 14 Northern Territory Government 2010. p347
- 15 Northern Territory Government 2010. p358
- 16 Northern Territory Government 2010. p351
- 17 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. p85
- 18 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. p59
- 19 Northern Territory Government 2010. p33
- 20 Terri Libesman. *Cultural Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out of Home Care*. SNAICC 2011 p48