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Broken Circles to a different identity

*An exploration of identity for Children
in out of home care in Queensland, Australia*

Thesis submitted by

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BA (Hons), MA (Arts Therapy)

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Arts and Social Sciences

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The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)*, the *Joint NHMRC Human Research Ethics Handbook (2002)*, *Burnside Research Code of Ethic (May 2000)* and the *James Cook University Manual: Standards Practices for Research and Teaching Human Subjects (2000)* and the *Standards of Professional Practice and Code of Ethics of the Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association Incorporated*. The proposed research methodology received clearance from the *James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee*, approval number H1833.

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Acknowledgements

There is no doubt that working full time within the context of child protection whilst trying to complete a PhD is both terribly difficult and exhausting. There were many moments of agonising over whether giving up would be a healthier option, with many months where I was unable to even consider working on my thesis as work demands took precedence. So first, I would like to thank and acknowledge the children, young people and workers who gave of their time and themselves. It was the need to honour their stories that ultimately gave me the impetus to carry on. Many thanks to my partner Kevin Palmer for all his support during the many years it took to complete this work.

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Just prior to completion of the final draft Wayne Daly made me aware of a group in Queensland, which highlights the importance of identity work for children in care. This is an excerpt from their Angel Identity website.

'Angel Identity is a community response to an upsetting incident a group of professional from these (foster care) agencies experienced.

Whilst travelling from a Foster Care forum in North Queensland this group of professionals stopped to visit the resting place of a young person that had recently passed away. He had been known to two of the group, his resting place was a pile of earth, and his headstone was a stubby cooler with a can of Jim Beam in it, some decaying flowers and a little green frog.

There was no marker on the grave to identify who he was, when he was born or when God had called him home. In death this young person had no identity. None of the group was able to walk away from this.... so began the journey to have a headstone placed on this young person's resting place. Angel Identity began ...Every child has the right to their identity, forever.'

Abstract

Broken Circles to a Different Identity: An exploration of identity for children in out of home care in Queensland Australia

Child protection manuals and literature emphasise that developing a sense of identity is one of the most important elements in achieving good outcomes for children and young people in out of home care. Yet, the very issue of identity raises questions that many child protection workers are ill equipped to answer. Current theories of identity development in children lack evidence from the children and young people themselves in informing these notions, which have been criticised as adult-centric. Essentially this research is about placing the narratives of children and young people in care to the forefront, whilst exploring what this means in practice by contextualising these narratives within the systemic paradigms that impinge upon their lived experience.

The research presented in this paper surveys the formation of identity for children and young people in out of home care, using narrative art therapy, with a particular emphasis on multi-cultural and Indigenous children and young people. The research provides insight into the images created by children and young people and explores identity, culture and sense of self from their own perspective.

The research was undertaken in a regional area of Queensland Australia where the majority of children in the child protection system who are identified as Indigenous come from two or more cultural backgrounds. Hence, the unique racial mix of the research site also provides insight into multi-cultural identity. Only two participants in the research were from only one culture and only one of these was Anglo Australian. Unlike other studies, which have focused on children who are from two cultures with one of these cultures being Anglo, the children in this study represented children from up to five cultures, ensuring a unique opportunity to explore how children negotiate several cultural identities simultaneously. As a consequence the research offers insights into the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, whilst exploring the issues that arise as both a consequence of adherence to the principle and practice that informs its implementation.

The second part of the research views identity from the perspective of professionals working in child protection and out of home care. The narratives within the research highlight the depth and complexity of working with children and identity in child protection, particularly for Indigenous workers. What becomes apparent as a consequence is the disempowerment experienced by the Indigenous workers along with the disparity in belief systems between those that underpin Indigenous identity and those embedded in child protection practice. As explored in this research, Indigenous identity is linked to the spirit and the spirit is intrinsic to healing. This thesis explores this question particularly as it pertains to Indigenous children in out of home care. This research proposes a new working paradigm that acknowledges non-western notions of identity as a way forward in developing alternative ways of working with Indigenous children in out of home care.

Abbreviations, Key Terms and Concepts

<p>Abuse types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual abuse • Psychological abuse • Physical abuse • Neglect 	<p>Child protection intervention in Queensland is based on the concept of harm or risk of harm pursuant to the <i>Child Protection Act 1999</i>:</p> <p>Part 3 Basic concepts</p> <p><i>Division 1 Key terms</i></p> <p>8. Who is a child</p> <p>A child is an individual under 18 years.</p> <p>9. What is harm</p> <p>(1) Harm, to a child, is any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>(2) It is immaterial how the harm is caused.</p> <p>(3) Harm can be caused by —</p> <p>(a) physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect;</p> <p>or</p> <p>(b) sexual abuse or exploitation.</p> <p>(4) Harm can be caused by —</p> <p>(a) a single act, omission or circumstance; or</p> <p>(b) a series or combination of acts, omissions or circumstances.</p> <p>Living in a domestic violence situation has also been incorporated into the reading of the Act.</p>
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

AICCA	Mackay and Whitsunday Aboriginal and Islander Foster Care and Protection Agency. This agency was the Peak Body representing Indigenous children in the care system and is now called the Central Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency
Alternative care Out of home care Foster care	Foster care, alternative care and out of home care are the terms used for a system in which a child who has been made a ward of the state and is cared for in either a private home of a state registered/approved caregiver referred to as a “foster parent”, or in a community or government run organisation, group home or institution. These placements can either be provided by the state directly or by a subcontracted for profit or not for profit organisation. These terms are used interchangeably.
ARC	Australian Research Council
ASSI	Australian South Sea Islander
Art maker	A person who creates an artwork. In the context of this study, the art maker is the child or young person who created the artwork.
Assessment	Gathering and analysis of the available information to assist professional judgment of strengths, risks and needs. This information and analysis is then developed into a realistic plan of action (ACWA, 2005).
Attachment	A long-term emotional bond and relationship between humans.
Attachment theory	A western-based theory that defines necessary attachment for healthy child development. Its most important tenet is that the infant needs to develop a strong emotional bond with at least one primary caregiver. Many argue that attachment theory has been wrongly assumed to be universal across cultures.
Casework	Regular direct contact with the child, young person or family and carrying out tasks and activities according to the case plan (ACWA, 2005).

Case management	Overall responsibility for implementation and coordination of tasks and activities that will meet the needs of the child or young person. Case management includes undertaking or arranging – assessment, case planning, coordination, monitoring and review. Case management incorporates decision-making responsibility (ACWA, 2005).
CMC	Crime and Misconduct Commission
CREATE	The CREATE foundation was formally known as the Australian Association of Young People in Care which was founded in 1993. It is the Peak Body that represents the voices of young people in care. <i>‘It has developed into a small volunteer driven organization with an office in every state and Territory around Australia’</i> (CREATE Website).
DOF/DCS Department	Department of Families was the name of the child protection department when the research was first instigated. The name changed to the Department of Child Safety during the research. DOF/DCS is also termed the Department throughout this thesis.
DOCS	The Department of Community Services is the New South Wales child protection agency.
Drift in Care	A form of systems abuse whereby children remain in long-term care without any permanency planning in place.
FSO/CSO	Family Services Officer was the name given to the delegated officers and case managers when the research began. This was changed during the research to Child Safety Officers when the Department changed its name. In Queensland CSO’s usually have a degree in Social Work, Psychology or the Social Sciences. The appropriateness of the degree to meet professional stream standards are monitored by human services within the Department upon application.
FRW/CSSO	Family Resource Workers was the name given to the usually Indigenous workers who were non-delegated officers. Like FSO the name was changed to Child Safety Support Officers.

High-risk	<p>The term high-risk is used in human services in a number of different contexts. In the context of child protection, high-risk is usually indicative of a cluster of predisposing factors being present, which research identifies as being factors which contribute to a parental predisposition to child abuse and/or neglect.</p> <p>For children and young people in care the term high-risk also refers to the factors that predispose a child to harmful risk taking behaviours. In the case of high-risk youth, the factors are such that the identified risk could result in the injury or death of the young person. These risk factors are often a result of abuse and can include a cluster of indicators such as: the presence of complex PTSD, self-harm and suicidal ideation depression, anti-social and/or violent behaviour, interface with the Juvenile Justice system, sexualised or sexually predatory behaviours, intergenerational abuse and familial history of suicides and incarcerations.</p>
Indigenous	<p>The word Indigenous originated from the Latin word <i>indigen(a)</i> meaning native or original inhabitant. In the context of this research it is used as way of defining people from several different Indigenous cultures in Australia.</p>
In the best interest of the child	<p>Historically this term was used as a guise to legitimise colonialisation. The 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child enshrined this principle within the convention without defining it. According to Ralph, the inherent subjectivity in the definition legitimises cultural bias by allowing decision makers from the dominant culture to impose values that are inconsistent with the minority group (Ralph, 1998).</p>
Kinship	<p>A universal term that is used to describe the extended family and a wider network of people who support the family by caring for children.</p>
Kinship Care Kinship Carers	<p>The term kinship is used in this thesis to refer to a historical tradition where clusters of individuals became involved in providing support to the family by caring for children. In the context of child protection, kinship carers, are carers who are registered to care for a particular family member/s who is under child protection orders.</p>

Layering	Layering is a creative technique used in art where a second layer is placed over the original layer, which may hide or obscure all or part of the initial layer.
Life Story Book work	A Life Story Book is a record of a child or young person's life. It is a chronological account of the child's personal history utilised by child protection workers to help develop and maintain identity for children in care.
Multi-cultural	A person with ancestors from two or more cultures.
NGO	Non-Government Organisation.
Placement breakdown	When a child is placed in care and the carer is no longer able nor wishes to continue to care for the child.
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
Respite	A short break for a carer whereby the child that is placed with them spends time in another placement. This is intended as a form of support for carers.
Self-placed	When a child or young person leaves a registered placement and stays somewhere else without departmental approval.
SCAN	Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect team
SPLAT	Super Participation Learning Action Team The local group of children in care who were also members of CREATE.
TSI	Torres Strait Islander
Young person Young people Children	Generally the term young person or young people is used for those people aged from around thirteen, however the demarcation is arbitrary and where I have used the term children in the research it also includes young people.
Totem	A totem is a stipulated non-human ancestor for a group of people such as a family, clan, group, lineage or tribe.

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Chapter One

Broken Circles to a Different Identity

The circle, 'expresses the totality of the psych in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by the Tibetan monks, in the ground plan of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomers, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life- its ultimate wholeness' (Jung, 1964, p. 66).

If there is a symbolic theme to arise out of this research it would be the circle for it appears, here as a visual symbol that is shared across cultures. By its very nature the circle represents wholeness, a space with no beginning or end. A space where inside of the circle can be considered sacred. Which is the case for many cultures, and the Australian Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander cultures, which are the focus of this research, are no exception. Circles are symbolic in Aboriginal art and ceremony and speak of the connection to the land, the spirit and the community.

The circle can also be a symbol for identity as evidenced by a number of Indigenous adult respondents in this research for example:

"The concept of the circle are absolute. The centre of everyone and everything. Throughout the different Aboriginal communities they each share the same concept, even though it may be in a different language or dialect, everything emanates from it and nothing exists outside the circle." (Aboriginal Elder, 2005)

and,

"Identity, it's like a circle because it's how you fit in and it's where you fit in." (Bree, 2005)

The image of a broken circle is powerful, for the broken circle is no longer a circle. The larger the space between the ends of the broken circle, the more the circle resembles an arch, it is no longer inclusive. It has been argued that the legacy of the stolen generation and past legislative practices has created many broken circles (*Bringing Them Home* report, Queensland Government, 1997, Haebich, 2001). This research seeks to explore what this means for children and young people in out of home care. Hence there is the assumption that kinship and family connection is important to identity to different degrees for different individuals.

This thesis started from an exploration of *Life Story Book* work with children in out of home care but ended up about something much larger. *Life Story Book* work is intrinsically about preserving and documenting a sense of identity for children who come into out of home care. This connection of *Life Story Book* work with identity thus led me on a journey to discover the historical context of identity theory and what this means for children in out of home care. There is much written in western literature about identity formation with age specific theories and stages mapping out “normal” identity formation in a healthy individual. The context of my work environment and working with Indigenous people certainly led me to wonder at the appropriateness of the *Life Story Book* models I was reviewing for non Anglo cultures, along with the theoretical assumptions underpinning the models. Ultimately it became apparent that the central premise, that identity is a staged process that culminates in a strong sense of individual identity after adolescence in order to be considered healthy, needed further investigation. Consideration needed to be given to other cultures but, perhaps arguably more important, the meaning of identity for children and young people in out of home care needed further investigation.

That this research represents a very small cohort of children (20) in a small regional Queensland town does not discount its pertinence. One of the key findings to come out of the *Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry into Child Abuse in Foster Care* (CMC) (2004) echoed the findings from a plethora of other judicially based enquiries into child protection, both here and internationally, that found that the child in child protection is not viewed as the primary client (Lonne & Thomson, 2005).

I believe that hearing the stories and views of children and young people who find themselves in the system helps to remind workers in the sector, myself included, who they are working for, that is, the children. How do the children with whom they work, perceive the work that they do? It reminds us that ‘children in care’ is only a category made up of individual children.

The CMC enquiry also highlighted how power-laden and conflictual managerial practices in staff relations within child protection, translates into staff recreating these same power dynamics with clients and other stakeholders. But what does this mean in practice for the children with whom we work?

The research site in itself was unique in the Indigenous racial mix it represented. Only two participants in the research were from only one culture and only one of these was Anglo Australian. Unlike other studies, which have focused on children who are from two cultures with one of these cultures being Anglo, the children in this study represented children from up to five cultures, ensuring a unique opportunity to explore how children negotiate several cultural identities simultaneously. It was also important to consider child protection work practices in terms of multi-cultural specificity and what this means for children in care.

Ever present is the disclosing of specificity in terms of the respondents. An underlying assumption throughout this research is that individual specificity does matter. That is, gender, culture, age cohort and family history all play a role in how we view the world and ourselves. That being said, my particular specificity as researcher, worker and resident at the time, are undeniably present throughout the research.

Just as I have made known the specificity of respondents in this research, it is important to also disclose my own, for this has influenced how this research was conducted, the facets discussed, along with widening the view beyond the specificity of Queensland to include learnings attained by working with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

My family were like thousands of other ‘*Ten Pound Poms*’ which was the name given to British families that paid ten pounds (in our case it was a little higher) in order to emigrate to Australia from England in the 1960’s and early 1970’s. Unlike the majority of British migrants, my father was born in Burma and escaped with his family as a refugee to India during the Second World War. As British citizens they were transported to London, where he met my mother.

We settled in Sydney where I was educated and ultimately studied Visual Communication Design at the then Sydney College of the Arts. It was here I majored in Photography and took extra subjects in etching, printmaking and ceramics. Being able to produce quality photographic prints (prior to the digital age) proved fortuitous in that as I travelled extensively I was able to obtain work. You do not need to be fluent in a language to be able to produce work in a dark room. It was during my travels in North Africa that I was confronted by what I considered later to be an existential crisis, a play in power between western photographer (myself) and cultural subject (the cultural other). The local Indigenous women did not want to be photographed with many believing that the photograph can ‘*take the spirit away*’. Hence I put down my camera and enrolled at the University of Sydney where I studied, Social Anthropology, Women’s Studies, Philosophy, Fine Arts and Social Theory, with Honours majoring in Fine Arts. It was through Foucault’s theories of power, knowledge and truth that I was able to give meaning to my experiences in North Africa as demonstrated by the following quotes.

‘Showing that scientific demonstration is basically only a ritual, that the supposedly universal subject of knowledge is really only an individual historically qualified according to certain modalities, and that the discovery of truth is really a certain modality of the production of truth; putting what is given as the truth of observation or demonstration back on the basis of rituals, of the qualifications of the knowing individual, of the truth-event system, is what I would call the archaeology of knowledge’(Foucault, 2006, p. 238).

'Relations of power are not in themselves forms of repression. But what happens is that, in society, in most societies, organisations are created to freeze the relations of power, hold those relations in a state of asymmetry, so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally, etc. And this totally freezes the situation. That's what one calls power in the strict sense of the term: it's a specific type of power relation that has been institutionalized, frozen, immobilized, to the profit of some and to the detriment of others'(Foucault, 1988, p. 1).

I remain to this day heavily influenced by Foucault and his exploration of power, discourse and subjectivity, in terms of acknowledging other cultural 'truths' and making explicit the power base behind knowledge making. I have no doubt that the diversity of these studies has also influenced my multi-disciplinary approach in this research. It was here at the University of Sydney that Arts Therapy became known to me and having also delved into Psychology and Psychoanalysis as part of my major, further study at Masters level in Arts Therapy seemed a natural progression. The Masters of Arts Therapy included intense study of both psychology and psychotherapy. In line with Foucault's ideas on narrative, as an Art Therapist, I practice from a narrative framework that places the client's stories and art making to the fore.

I have worked in three states across Australia as a qualified Arts Therapist, primarily with traumatised children and families, for over eighteen years both in Government and non-Government organisations and as a private practitioner and consultant. During this time I also worked in Child Protection in a variety of different roles ranging from Intake and Assessment Officer to Team Leader and Manager. My role as Reconnect Worker, which specifically focused on connection for Indigenous children in out of home care, was pivotal in providing the base line data that provided the impetus for this research and is further explored in Chapter Three.

I also believe that it is this depth of experience across the child protection sector, that leaves me in a perhaps unique position of being able to critique the sector from a variety of different positions, namely as a child and family trauma counsellor, a child protection worker, as a worker in the non-government sector (NGO) and as an academic.

I have also worked for an Indigenous child protection and out of home care organisation as a project worker, where I was the only non-Indigenous employee, and as an Out of home Care Team Leader in the Northern Territory. More recently I managed a new service in the Northern Territory, that provided trauma counselling for Aboriginal children who live on remote communities across the Northern Territory, of which there are over ninety. I worked in some thirty-five of these communities. As a new service within an untried cultural context, the service utilised Action Learning and aimed to arrive at a transferable model of therapeutic practice, appropriate to the remote community and cultural context. For many of the children and families who live remotely, English is a second, third or fourth language. The use of creative therapies proved successful (according to feedback from the families and communities involved) in being both culturally appropriate and being able to transcend language barriers. The privilege of being able to work with Aboriginal people from so many different communities has undoubtedly increased my cultural understanding and knowledge. As explored in this thesis, Indigenous identity is linked to the spirit and the spirit is intrinsic to healing. But what does this mean for western practice and our work with Indigenous children, families and communities. This thesis explores this question particularly as it pertains to Indigenous children in out of home care.

Inclusion and reference to the Northern Territory also served another purpose, in that I was able to highlight the differences between Aboriginal communities and people, whilst also recognising that there are fundamental aspects of Aboriginal, and for that matter Torres Strait and South Sea Islander cultures, that lay at the heart of their identity and cultural specificity that are also shared. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colonial history along with kinship systems also mean that for many Indigenous people, familial and cultural connections extend across Australia, which has pertinence for their children in out of home care.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2006 found '32% of Indigenous people live in major cities, with 21% in inner regional areas and 22% in outer regional areas, while 9% lived in remote and 15% live in very remote areas... While the majority of Indigenous people live in urban settings, the Indigenous population is much more widely dispersed across the country than the non-Indigenous population, constituting a much higher proportion of the population in the Northern Territory and more remote areas' (ABS, 2008a cited in Dudgeon, 2010, p. 39).

This has repercussions for Indigenous children in care if we consider the dispersal of extended family.

The ongoing disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people in Australia is well documented.

‘The National Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report: Key indicators 2005/2007/2009 Reports (SCRGSP, 2005, 2007, 2009) show that Indigenous people are the most disadvantaged group in Australia’ (Dudgeon, 2010, p. 34).

These reports found:

- Indigenous students are half as likely to continue to year 12
- Average income for Indigenous people is lower
- Life expectancy is around 9.7 to 11.5 years lower than that of Australia
- Suicide death rates are much higher for Indigenous people
- The rate of child protection notifications are rising faster for Indigenous people
- Homicide rates are six times higher
- Indigenous people are 12 times more likely to be hospitalised for assault
- Indigenous women’s incarceration rates have increased
- Indigenous juveniles are 20 times more likely to be detained in custody
- Indigenous children have double the hospital admissions and a mortality rate up to three times higher than non-Indigenous children
- Indigenous people are four times more likely to be hospitalised for alcohol-related mental and behavioral disorders.

These findings emphasise the complex nature of Indigenous disadvantage, which has pertinence and relevance for Indigenous children in the child protection system.

The research begins in Chapter Two by exploring the notion of identity formation historically in the West, through the lens of a number of disciplines and how this translates into current child protection practice. It discusses the linear nature of Attachment Theory, along with various critiques of this approach such as, Feminist Theories, Deconstruction Theory and Critical Psychology. Foucault's notion of scientific truth and power is considered within the context of the Medical Model and psychiatric diagnosis, along with the psychological notion of the unified self.

Culture and identity is also explored through the lens of Social Anthropology and more recent research into dual cultural identity. Culture is explored further via referencing a number of different cultural notions of identity. Discussed in greater depth are the Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander cultures within the context of Australia and the Aboriginal concept of the spirit's link to healing, identity and wellbeing.

Notions and constructs of childhood have also influenced, or it could be argued, dictated the child's positioning within child protection practice. Given Attachment and Developmental Theories' influence on social work practice, they are explored in more depth as the cyclical notion of Aboriginal Identity is juxtaposed with the linear nature of Developmental Identity Theory, which sets the scene to explore Child Protection in context.

Chapter Three, Child Protection in Context discusses the systemic, political and historical context that informs child protection practice both more widely and within the context of the research site. This research was first undertaken as part of a research partnership between the School of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University and the then Mackay/Whitsunday Regional Office of the Queensland Department of Families, which, with Australian Research Council (ARC) funding undertook a number of locally based research initiatives which included; the commencement of five Doctorates, research that focused on foster carers, research that looked at child wellbeing indicators for Indigenous children, along with regular collaboration on a number of action research based service provision trials.

Within this environment research was well supported, making it easier for full-time workers to contemplate further study.¹

Chapter Three also discusses some of the findings to come out of this rich research based work environment. This work environment also included a group of young people in care who were involved, and informed many facets of the research partnership. Super Participation Action Learning Team (known as SPLAT) who were also part of CREATE, were based in the Area Office and had easy and regular access to senior staff, including the Regional Director and James Cook University partnership academics.²

The abuse type, neglect is expanded upon from Chapter Two and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* is discussed within the context of this research, as is children's interface with other systems such as child and youth mental health and education. Research findings as part of my work in the Northern Territory, further informs this research by discussing a reworking of systems theory, to perhaps provide a more culturally appropriate model for Indigenous families and communities generally. Hence, the contextual scene is set, with the addition of an historical exploration into Indigenous history within the Queensland context.

Chapter Four, Research Design Methods and Processes examines ethical considerations, research rationale, aims and relevance, methodology, research design, processes and limitations. The use of art as a research data tool is also discussed.

1 Unfortunately this kind of support was short lived once the Department restructured post CMC. It has been my experience in both Queensland and the Northern Territory that independent research is generally not supported by the child protection system. Hence while working in the industry was able to provide me with valuable insights and, I believe a greater understanding of the inherent complexities, the reality of the crisis driven environment, along with chronic resource and systemic issues, ensured that there was no time or capacity for study.

2 I would argue that the constant presence of young people in care in the child protection office environment was a healthy reminder of whom we are working for. However there were numerous staff complaints at the time in that many workers felt 'uncomfortable' with sharing their workplace with young people in care, who were advocating to be heard. Confidentiality issues were also raised as reasons to cease their presence in the office, even though these young people had to sign the same confidentiality paperwork as all other employees. This discomfort reinforces the power paradigm that workers exert over clients. That is, the office space being off limits to children in care, when in fact the office, it could be argued is their 'family home' given the Chief Minister is their legal guardian.

Foucault's epistemological approach, which recognises discourse as a social language created by particular conditions at a particular time helped shape the ontological approach that seeks to explore the perspective of the respondents in the research and the meaning these individuals placed on their lived experience. To this end the research is qualitative but in line with pragmatic research methodology, a variety of quantitative research tools were also utilised such as triangulation, prolonged observation, thematic analysis and pattern-making, which can compensate for the generally ungeneralisable nature of pure qualitative data analysis (Newman & Benz, 1998; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). As a non-Indigenous researcher, the selection of a qualitative approach would help ensure that the voices of the children, young people and practitioners involved in the study would be at the centre of the findings.

In Chapter Five, Participants Profiles and Vicissitudes of Life, we are introduced to the twenty children and young people who took part in this research. The chapter starts off more generally by analysing the research sample against the common data fields such as gender, culture, care status, number of schools they have attended and number of placements, which leads into the known narrative of each participant's life. Also highlighted is the chosen interview context for each participant. The inclusion of these narratives was vital in providing a snapshot into the complexities of the lives of many of the children in out of home care. It also provides a context and a means of data comparison for the interviews and artwork, which are explored in Chapters Six and Seven.

In Chapter Six, What Children and Young People Had to Say, I explore via thematic analysis, what the children and young people said during the interviews. Identity, culture, family, school and the child protection system arose as themes, as did loss and grief, trust and feelings. This chapter also analyses the data outcomes of the questionnaire provided to older participants thus enhancing our knowledge of these young people's sense of identity and body image.

Chapter Seven explores the artwork and the art making via thematic analysis and triangulation of audiencing, that is, how the art-maker, the researcher and an Aboriginal Artist/Healer view the artwork and the art making process. Each child's work is presented as a case study, which draws together other data collected and discussed in the previous two chapters.

Chapter Eight, On Working with Identity and Children, analyses the research findings from interviews conducted with workers in child protection and out of home care. The research makes explicit the gender and cultural specificity of each of the eleven participants as the participants discussed identity, family and culture within the context of their own lives and with the children with whom they work. Thematic analysis was used in this section of the research and the workers recounted work experiences relevant to the research, which culminated in Indigenous workers highlighting a number of systemic and practice issues along with covert racist practices as they viewed them. Workers also provided some of their own recommendations, which are also documented in this chapter.

Chapter Nine, Discussions and Conclusions, seeks to explore what the research tells us, and the possible implications for child protection practice. Initiatives that were implemented in Queensland after this research took place, such as *Family Group Conferencing* are discussed and a new model of practice is proposed which incorporates learnings from the research.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Locations

In 2003, the Queensland Government released the discussion paper *Stopping the Drift: Improving the lives of Queensland's children and young people in long-term care*. It referred to identity – that sense of “who am I?” as being ‘...vital to their (foster children’s) sense of worth, where they belong, their personal history and cultural connections’ and ‘[p]ersonal identity is the result of multiple psychological, social and cultural influences towards the building of an integrated and unified self’ (2003, p. 22). The paper goes on to explain that ‘concepts such as identity, security and sense of belonging can be elusive and difficult to define or measure’ (2003, p. 23). From where have these ideas about identity originated? Here identity is linked to self-esteem with the ultimate process being developmental, in that the goal is to ‘build an integrated and unified [individual] self’ (2003, p. 23). The notion of identity and identity formation in the west can historically be dated back to Plato who viewed the self as the only object, which one can learn about with any degree of assurance. Today, certainty of self, it seems, remains as elusive as the concept of identity itself.

Since the Western Enlightenment the study of identity, the individual, the self, the sense of I, which have become interchangeable concepts, has taken many twists and turns as it was simultaneously viewed through the lens of a number of different disciplines, which in turn recreated its own paradigms. This chapter seeks to explore identity through a number of these lenses along with more cross-cultural perspectives. It was also important to include more recent research such as neurobiology and neurodevelopment theory, as this has direct implications on how we view and treat children who have experienced trauma which, arguably, has a direct impact upon identity and self-esteem. Theories important to Social Work practice such as Developmental, Attachment and Psychological Theories are explored alongside Aboriginal Identity Theory and healing practices and in so doing the incongruence between the two becomes apparent.

Historical Perspectives and the Psychological Subject

Sampson locates identity within a historical political context, that is, within a particular time and place. In line with Adorno (1967, 1973), Habermass (1971) and Marcuse (1964, 1966), he establishes its formation within the bourgeois individual and describes it as:

‘...an entity who is the integrated centre of certain powers: one who is aware, who feels, who thinks, judges facts...the individual is adopted as a primary reality, the ontological base from which issues the remainder, including society and social relations’ (Sampson, 1989, p. 3).

To Marcuse (1966), it was in the medieval period that people began to take on notions of individual agency as ‘... individuals [were] directly confronted with the task of self maintenance and survival...The individual arose as a dynamic cell of economic activity’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972, p. 203) interested in securing what economic benefits were possible’ (Sampson, 1989, p. 4). Foucault noted that autobiographies appeared in the twelfth century but the concept “I” made the shift towards individuality and self-responsibility only in the nineteenth century. The Renaissance is noted as the time for the birth of the individual, the end of the feudal system and a boom in scientific knowledge. To Burman, it was during Western Enlightenment that ‘[T]he rational body of man thus gave birth to the developing, progressive baby of psychology and western culture.’ The strategies the state uses in order to maintain social order are ‘...rendered natural. The interests of the state determine what counts as healthy or unhealthy functioning’ (1997, p. 137).

To Pancer, social psychology has ‘its roots primarily in the United States, the values it took on ...were largely those prevalent in American culture. These values include democracy, individual rights and the ability of the individual to overcome any obstacles to growth and development’ (1997, p. 164). Sampson argues that psychology, in studying and presenting so-called facts...contribute primarily to societal reproduction ‘and this model is at the heart of advanced capitalism and contains the qualities of the North American version of the psychological subject – as a self-contained individualism’ (1989, p. 1).

Developmental Identity Formation

To the Department of Health (U.K), individual identity is viewed as an ‘...internal model, which allows each person to have a perception of themselves as an individual and social being’. The manual goes on to explain ‘[F]rom the time a child is born, he or she begins to develop an individual identity...’ and the ‘social world in which the child inhabits can influence identity formation’ (Department of Health, 2000, p. 44). This is in line with the concepts found in the *Looking After Children* framework, which informs child protection practice both in England and in parts of Australia. It recommends that identity be incorporated as one of the seven dimensions to be considered throughout Departmental intervention and ‘...child care workers have become increasingly aware of how essential a secure sense of identity is in children’s well-being’. The experience of living in foster care can constitute a threat to this sense of identity usually formulated ‘naturally’ as a basic task of parenting (Parker, et al., 1991, p. 99).

Developmental theories have continued to inform child protection practice frameworks. For Erikson (1963), ego identity is achieved through a process of ‘identity crises’. Of eight stages, there are five developmental phases each with its own identity crisis to be resolved. Working through a crisis leads to a resolution of an identity conflict. Erikson (1963) argued that children need to emerge from childhood with a definite sense of who they are. Youth is viewed as a period in which ‘role confusion’ leads to clarity in one’s identity.

Unlike Erikson’s proposal, that it is between the ages of thirteen years and nineteen years of age that identity is finally established, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory (1923) suggest an individual’s personality is shaped during the early years of childhood via interplay between the Ego, the Superego and the Id. We constantly reenact our developmental history and are subject to our unconscious drives. Like Erikson, Freud proposed developmental stages each with a pathology associated with it. Freud also adopts the medical model of cause-effect-cure, thus assuming a normal/abnormal dichotomy. The dogma of western religion that located mental illness as being under the control of the devil and thus external, was replaced by an internal demon of the unconscious which could be dealt with externally, by Freud and his contemporaries (Slee, 1993).

Highlighted in many developmental theories is the linking of healthy identity development to a child's sense of separateness from others (Bowlby, 1982; Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1972; Wells & Stryker, 1988; Slee, 1993) identified the fixed stages of development theory as sharing the following attributes:

- the process is orderly, linear and lasts a reasonable time;
- the new state is judged as more desirable than the previous state;
- as an outcome, the organism is healthier, better and more organised.

Other theorists have challenged the fixed stage concept by including to some extent the cultural and social contexts that face adolescence (e.g. Coleman, 1980; Heaven, 1994; Hooker, 1991; Marcia, 1966, 1980) which take into account relationships, achievement and commitment. However, they still assume a series of 'crises' that need to be resolved and, like Erikson's theory, consider a prolonged sense of identity confusion 'can lead to personality difficulties in adulthood' (see Conger & Galambos, 1997; Kroger, 1989; Peterson & Hardin, 1997; Downs, 2001).

For Merleau-Ponty (1964), the process of reflection, that is, the reaction of significant others to a child, is the process by which the child obtains a fuller sense of self and thus differentiation can occur. For attachment theorists like Winnicott, Klien and Milner, identity is affected by stages of attachment and separation.³ Sloan (1997) describes identity as one of the fundamental concepts of psychology. He cites major theorists such as Freud, Jung, Adler, Fromm, Erikson, Horney, Allport, Skinner etc, as producing 'full-blown' personality theories setting out to find out the '*truth of human nature*'. Such a notion implies the reality of a single essential truth. These theories are all still developmental in nature with the final outcome being individuation. Not achieving this outcome could lead to a personality crisis and/or psychopathology.

3 Attachment Theory has had a huge impact on social work practice and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Critical Approaches

Many theorists have criticised developmental based theories by highlighting their perceived gendered, class and culturally based subject.

Slugoski and Ginsburg challenge Erikson in that his theory neglects:

'The objective conditions of a large segment of human kind for whom the envisaging of alternative possible futures would be a futile, self-delusionary exercise. For a great many people, then, the notion of normative crisis and hence identity achievement may simply not apply; for such individuals there is no problem of identity' (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. 37).

Slugoski also suggests that achieving identity during adolescence may be a 'privilege extended only to western males living in a surplus economy' (1989, p. 38). He locates identity achievement historically with the concept of the bourgeois and cites that the majority of studies on identity have confined their subjects to males, the bulk of whom were North American College students (1989, p. 40). To Slugoski, Erikson finds little place for women's identity and such theories are inappropriate for marginal and economically underprivileged groups due to their bourgeois roots.

Feminist scholars have taken this position further to argue at the gender-specific nature of identity theories and personhood. Gilligan charges that developmental theorists such as Erikson, Piaget and Bettelheim, implicitly adopt the male life as the norm. She uses Erikson's emphasis on separateness as an example of how women's experience remains devalued within these theories. She suggests that the 'non-relational' theory of the self that 'dominates western thinking' presents a 'disembodied male ego, which silences women's voices and plays down the need to treat others as concrete beings' (1982, p. 198). Like children's development, women's development remains as a deficit and less mature.

Australian research points towards a masculinity model where masculine traits confer benefits to both male and female adolescents (Antill & Cunningham, 1982). These preferences however remain problematic for females who are regarded as immature if they take on feminine behaviours and not feminine enough if they take on more

“masculine” behaviours such as independence, competitiveness and confidence (Downs, 2001). Fraser explores the construction of gender in identity and in doing so questions the supposition that gender remains a fixed notion once gender identity has been attained (1999).

To Foucault, the “self” is constructed as the subject and object of discourse at a particular historical point in time. Through discourse in the past century the “self” was formulated as a new object of study. Foucault also explores the issue of power delegated by discourse and who is permitted to define discourse. He suggests that discourse transmits and produces power (Foucault, 1980a). Luke applies Foucault’s theory in that western discourses derive their authoritative power to construct meaning and cites the example of childhood as a construct. These meanings become reproduced through public sites such as the media to produce ‘social identities’ like ‘child’, ‘race’ and ‘gender’ (1994, p. 290).

Deconstructionists are also critical of ‘core identity’ theories. Derrida (1984) challenges the theory in that ‘I’ cannot exist without ‘other’. Or ‘A’ is both ‘A’ and not ‘A’. Meanings are constituted in and through language and language by nature is dynamic in its constant change. Derrida views ideology as permeating the very core of personhood. ‘Ideology is a practice of representation’, which produces certain meanings and necessitating certain subjects as their supports (Coward & Ellis, 1977, p. 67).

Critical Psychology has also charged the discipline of mainstream psychology of ‘using its investigations to gird its own loins’ and questions the social utility of the discipline if its major goal is that of sustaining itself’ (Gergen, 1985, p. 78). The study of the self and hence identity is charged with being at the core of this paradigm.

The Medical Model

For Foucault, scientific truth is a product of the dominant discourse in society, which reproduces sites of power and knowledge. Truth ‘induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as truth...(as well as) the status of those who are charged with saying what counts’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 131).

Rather than viewing each discourse as influencing and supporting the other within a particular paradigm, “pure” scientific theory is posed as a universal truth. The closer each discipline can align itself with science the more powerful it’s positioning.

Psychiatry began at the end of the eighteenth century from within the ‘science’ of medicine. Even in those early days there was no agreement on how to classify mental illness, ‘some thought to do it by symptoms, others by causes’ (Russell, 1995). The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* is widely utilised in the west as a means of diagnosing psychiatric illness. Russell argues that as a product of the American Psychiatric Association the DSM is ‘firmly embedded in the medical psychiatric tradition’ (1995, p. 27). A mental disorder is defined as a clinically significant behavioural or psychological syndrome that occurs in a person (DSM-3R).

The notion of an integrated and unified self is reflected in DSM classifications and thus the treatment of certain personality disorders. Pedersen, in his study of the history of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) exposes some of the DSMs basic assumptions about identity. MPD involves a ‘...breakdown of identity, a failure to integrate various aspects of identity, memory and consciousness’ (American Psychiatric Association 1994, p. 484). Pedersen explores how these medical discourses make their way into the public domain by combining with other discourses and domains to produce a concrete finding. This ‘disease’ is framed in terms of a ‘host’ or ‘primary’ person and the other personalities are known as ‘alters’ or ‘alternate personalities’. Treatment is focused on a therapist establishing contact with individual alters, until finally the alters are fused into one ‘true’ identity, that of the host person, and the patient is thus ‘integrated’ or cured.

It is also argued that for many people the diagnosis becomes their identity
⁴(Pedersen, 2000).

4 This was certainly the case for two children I was working with as part of my Art Therapy practicum. The children were 8 and 10 years old and were diagnosed with Multiple Personality Disorder as a consequence of alleged ritual abuse. The children spoke of their diagnosis and talked through what they called “alters” MPD it appears became intrinsic to their identity.

Pedersen's exploration confronts us with some of the major assumptions held at the core of identity theory, that is, that there is a 'core' or 'true' identity and, for more than one identity to exist within a person represents a pathology to be cured by experts. The emphasis embedded within western culture is on 'wholeness and integration, at least as an ideal state of personhood to be attained' (Sampson, 1989, p. 14).

This notion of 'real' or 'authentic self', Garrett argues, has made its way into popular psychology's concept of Anorexia Nervosa. Girls are more prone to eating disorders because they are socialised to rely heavily on external acceptance and feedback to inform their identity. Their 'authentic self' is not autonomous, 'but connected'. This illness most commonly experienced by adolescent girls, posits a 'split' self (Garrett, 1998, p. 53).

To Hill and Tisdall, identity can be 'problematic for children whose sense of who they are is threatened by negative social images, discontinuities of life experience or conflicting loyalties' (1997). Perry explores early trauma through the lens of Neurosequential Brain Development. Perry argues that the process of brain development can have a profound negative effect upon identity formation and wellbeing (2006).

Identity and Culture

Social Anthropology, like every other discipline was specific to its historical context. It was also captive to the scientific paradigm and belief systems of the day. Like many other disciplines that held the sense of 'I' as being the anti-thesis of the 'other', social anthropology 'was built on the putative cultural distance between anthropologist and anthropologised, on the largely unexamined assumption of the difference between the self (observer) and the other (observed)' (Cohen, 1994, p. 5).

This positioning allowed for 'scientific truths' about people from other cultures to be 'discovered' and filtered through the lens of the belief systems of the day. Anthropological discourse has differed from dominant psychological discourse in that identity is perceived as having a cultural base.

Cohen expresses further the difficulties experienced by anthropologists in interpreting notions of identity during field research and that ‘historically another feature of concern in anthropology has been the attempt to distinguish between such categories as ‘individual’, ‘person’ and ‘self’ in that the distinctions are arbitrary and difficult to sustain’ (1994, p. 2). If, to draw on Derrida, meanings are constituted through language, it is interesting to consider how an anthropologist could communicate the concept of individual identity to people from a culture where no language and/or concept existed.

This issue still exists today for Aboriginal people where English is a second, third or fourth language. For example, there are many concepts that do not translate across into Yolgnu Martha ⁵ and visa a versa (Trudgen, 2000)⁶.

Cohen explores Meads notion of cultural identity in that, ‘identity is derived partly from culture, which explains the similarities to be observed among the members of a society. It is also mediated through an individual’s consciousness’ (Cohen, 1994, p. 1). Barthes, (1969) saw identity as an ‘intentional construction designed to secure for its’ bearer the greatest advantage in his or her dealings with significant others’. Bathes argued for the malleability of identity, which runs contrary to the western notion of a fixed, or core identity (in Cohen, 1994, p. 1). Bathes, Levi-Strauss and de Heusen viewed individuality as a theoretical and practical problem in that individuals are ‘determined products of their social environment’ (Cohen, 1994, p. 21). Howard also explores anthropological texts on the self and points to the ‘cultural boundedness of western concepts’ and ‘the aim is to release “scientific theory”, which should be universal, from the shackles imposed by western “folk” psychology, which is culturally constricted’ (1985, p. 403).

5 North Eastern Arnhem Land Aboriginal Language Group

6 A recent article in the NT News highlighted how language and communication issues can have dire consequences. The article discussed the detaining of mental health patients in a secure mental health facility for long periods of time as being a breach of basic human rights. One of the examples, which raised significant concerns, was; “I heard this story of an Indigenous person who, when asked, told his treatment team he was hearing voices. On another day when an interpreter was present, the same person was able to say he did hear voices—the voices of doctors asking if he was hearing voices. He thought they were checking his hearing.” (Mr. Eddie Cubillo, NT Community Visitors Program, cited in NT News, Saturday, November 12, 2011, p. 20)

Okitikpi explores the plight of interracial children, which has direct implication for the child protection system. Citing studies from England with children from a mixed Caribbean/Anglo ancestry, welfare professionals it is argued, often 'view these children as lacking' and assume that it would be in the best interest of the child if they 'were to be nurtured in an environment that takes into account only one part of their identity.' It is suggested that children from interracial parentage should be encouraged to 'view themselves as non-white and helped to develop their black identity' (2001, p. 2). He goes on to claim that if current assumptions are maintained, the voices of children's lived experience will go unheard as they continue to negotiate this space in-between cultures. Okitikpi echoes Baldwin, who in 1979 found that failure to develop a positive black identity in the face of racism can lead to identity confusion along with low self-esteem and self hatred (Thoburn, 2000).

In the 1970s several models of 'black' identity transformation were developed in the USA, the most influential being Cross's model of 'psychological nigrescence' (1971, 1978, 1980) which, is a four stage process for developing a black identity (defined as a psychological connection with one's racial group). To Cross, only once there has been 'successful resolution of one's racial identity' can an individual 'shift attention to other identity concerns such as religion, gender and sexual preference, career development and social class' (Cross, 1995, p. 113). Cross echoes developmental theories' linear and staged assumption with major transformation assumed to occur in adolescence.

Cross-Cultural Explorations

In the west, there exists a clear demarcation between individual identity and cultural or group identity. More recent social anthropological research reveals this may not be so for many other cultures. Friedman explores identity for the Ainu, a well known ethnic minority in Japan. The Ainu are not recognised politically in Japan. In response they have built a traditional village where tourists visit. Friedman argues that 'tourist production and display have become central in the conscious reconstruction of Ainu identity...[t]he representation of Ainu selfhood is a political instrument in the constitution of that selfhood.' In this instance cultural identity must be acknowledged by others if it is to have 'real existence' for it is in the Ainu's 'defining themselves for the Japanese, their significant other, that they establish their specificity' (1994, p. 110).

A study of the Melanesian concept of self revealed that for Melanesians the self *'cannot be understood outside of a religious context and without reference to emic ideas of spirit'* and *'... Melanesian selves are flexible and fluid, as well as contextually and historically engaged. In this society 'self' is based on ideas involving gendered emotions and 'power' is the condition of this gendered difference'* (Stephen, 1989, cited in Dalton, 2002, pp. 118–119). Physical sex is viewed apart from gender, thus gender boundaries are fluid.

Dalton also argues that due to the 'colonial global economic situation' the self is 'simultaneously [I]ndigenous and colonially influenced' (2002, p. 119). For Dalton colonial discourse has undermined the pre-colonial. An example of this would be the uptake of Christianity by Aboriginal people once the missionaries settled in remote Australia.

Leibkind compares eastern and western concepts of the self, he sites Nguyen and Williams (1989) in that the 'traditional South East Asian self and the family are integral, not separable concepts' (1996, p. 161). The notion of the family and filial piety is the single most important construct binding and organising South East Asian psychological experience and social reality (Nidorf, 1985).

For the Lohorung culture in Nepal, certain flowers represent the particular state of the persons *Saya*, or 'ancestral soul', which reside in the person and therefore reflects the state of that person's relationships with their ancestors. It is a 'metaphysical essence', which can be strong or weak and grows with metaphysical knowledge.

'It is a person's vulnerability...which ontologically binds a person to another world so that ultimately it is impossible for total freedom to operate as 'anything that threatens the harmony of the mythical world is condemned: it is Phenni [immoral/wrong]. House ancestors are linked to a child being acknowledged and fully accepted by the community which only occurs through maturation' (Hardman, 2000, p. 176).

Ito (1985) explored the Hawaiian concept of the self. She also establishes the importance of ancestors to identity in that, '[t]he establishment of interdependence is much more central to the Hawaiian ethos than personal autonomy and achievement. An individual alone is unthinkable in the context of Hawaiian relationships' (Handy & Pukui, 1972, p. 75 cited in Ito, 1985).

Hawaiian culture is surrounded by social links which extend through time from one's ancestors through to one's self which continues on through the generations and horizontally through one's own kin and friends' (Ito, 1985, p. 305). The Hawaiian concept of self is grounded in social and spiritual relations as well as within the natural world. A person is defined and defines themselves by the quality of these interpersonal bonds. 'For Hawaiians self and other, person and group, people and environment, are inseparable they all inter-actively create, effect and even destroy each other' (Ito, 1985, p. 301).

Fruzetti explores a women's sense of identity in Indian culture which changes when she marries, in that the incoming wife 'dissolves her individuality and becomes one of a collectivity' as she learns to be 'docile and humble' and sacrifice her needs for the good of the collective (1982, p. 98-99). Within developmental theory then, most Indian women who marry would be considered as suffering from an ongoing identity crisis, which suggests that, perhaps the use of Developmental Identity Theory within the context of traditional Indian culture is unhelpful in this regard.

Hutnick (1992) constructed ethnic identity into four categories for multi-cultural people namely:

- **Dissasociative** - identification with their minority cultural group status to the exclusion of their cultural majority (Anglo);
- **Assimilative** - identification with their cultural majority (Anglo) and denial of their cultural minority roots;
- **Acculturative** - identification with both cultures;
- **Marginal** - some other category of identification is used such as job, leisure activity.

It is interesting to note that Hutnick does not contemplate the presence of more than two cultural identities at once. Five children in this research were from up to four or five different cultures and were able to relate to all of these cultures, sometimes preferencing one over the other without exclusion. Hutnick's model seems to only infer an Anglo/Ethnic choice, which ignores the reality of multi-ethnic/multi-racial children who are not Anglo.

Australian Indigenous Cultures and Identity

Like other cultures with a colonial history, Darwinism dominated notions of race for the Anglo population, which in Australia was the dominant discourse between 1870 until the 1920s (Smith, 1980). Darwin himself travelled to Tasmania as a young man and on noting the rapid decline of the Aboriginal population saw it as a biological process, a display of natural selection. He said of one well-known Aboriginal woman named Trucanini, that she “*possessed less intelligence than a dog*” and described her as one “*...who uses very few abstract words, cannot count to four, exert herself-consciousness, or reflect on the nature of her existence*” (Darwin in Smith, 1980, p. 14). Such notions found their way into the dominant discourse where Aboriginals were deemed as savage, immoral and culturally static. For example, Pitt-Rivers in 1867 declared that, ‘[t]he savage is morally and mentally an unfit instrument for the spread of civilisation’ (Pitt-Rivers in Smith, 1980, p. 15).

James Collier in the *Pastoral Age in Australia* 1911 wrote, ‘[t]he only wrong on the part of the blacks is their all-round inferiority and their inability to till the ground’ (Collier in Smith, 1980, p. 15).

Indigenous Australians were thus cast as ‘other’ which became endorsed both politically and culturally. Politically in that Aboriginal people became non-citizens; whilst paternalistic social policy reinforced the belief that Aboriginal people also lacked the ability to develop a sense of individual identity. The colonial power had seized the right to define the other whilst at the same time the Aboriginal population was being annihilated. Some would argue that this annihilation like others, later led to ‘...attempt[s] to reconstruct the unique-cultures of primitive societies in their self-contained purity’ (Pietz, 1985, p. 5).

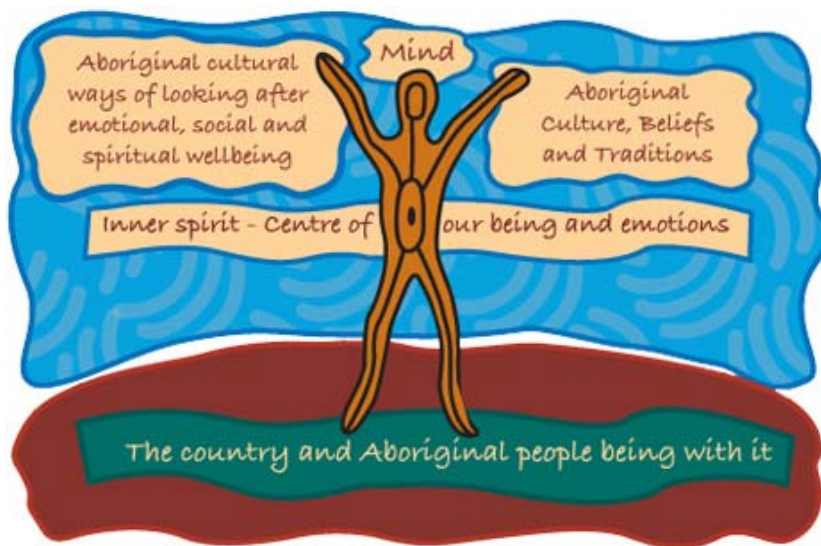
Myers explored the notion of identity among traditional Pintupi⁷ society in Australia. He argues that ‘...shared identity with others is a primary feature of selfhood...Their concept of shared identity represents a cultural appropriation of the significant relations of cooperation and exchange that lie at the heart of Pintupi social life’ (1991, p. 104).

7 Pintupi refers to an Aboriginal Group who originated from Western Australia and are now located in the Northern Territory, near Alice Springs.

Myers warns that to use western concepts of 'self' and 'selfhood' which are linked with the notion of the individual, is highly problematic in this context in that the 'existential problem of giving meaning to one's action and place is not universal' (1991, p. 105). The term *walytja*, which is central to the Pintupi people, reflects a sense of belonging together or shared identity. 'This critical notion of relatedness is rooted in the givenness of the individual, extended outwards from a spirit whose identity is derived from The Dreaming' (Myers, 199, p. 105). Fundamental to the Pintupi sense of identity is its extension to persons, place and things beyond the physical individual. The totem is an important symbol for the individual as it is reflective of this concept. For the Pintupi people, one becomes complete and autonomous only through sustaining relations with others (Myers, 1991, pp. 109-110).

For Aboriginal identity context is everything. Dudgeon cites Roe⁸ a Karajarri/Yawru health worker who explains the spiritual context of identity by referring to the Ngarlu which in Karajarri language defines the inner spirit. Contained within the Ngarlu is our Bilyurr and Rai.

Ngarlu Assessment



©Joe Roe Ngarlu Assessment Model, Roe, NWHS, in Dudgeon et.al.,2000

8 Joe Roe, (Purungu by skin name), is a Karajarri/Yawru man. His people are also from the Broome and Bidyadanga area. He completed a Bachelor of Applied Science in Indigenous Community Health (Mental Health Counselling Specialisation) in 1996. http://www.pallottine.org.au/waraja_ngarlu_wanduna.htm Recent research specific to Queensland Aboriginal people in terms of spirituality and identity is currently unavailable, however the model proposed by Roe is consistent with the findings in this and other research including models proposed by SNAICC reviewed later in this thesis.

Bilyurr is our spirit from within, which is in oneness with our physical body. Rai is our spirit from the country. The father dreams or sees the “child spirit” that wondered from the group dwelling place...He is now aware that his wife is or will be pregnant and that the child’s spiritual connection in the form of an animal, fish, plant or a particular area in the land will coincide during the pregnancy, and be his/her Rai. The physical and spiritual conceptual place of birth becomes the central part of the identity of that person and he also becomes a protector/custodian. When we pass away our Rai(spirit from the country) goes back to the country where it pre-existed and becomes a “child spirit” again, and remains in the group ...awaiting another spiritual rebirth’ (Roe cited in Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett, 2000, pp.395–401).

According to Roe, the Ngarlu has been ‘weakened by the colonisation process which has led to things like changed lifestyles, dispossessions, disempowerment, alcohol and drugs. Ngarlu is what kept people strong and healthy...it gave a strong sense of self, where the spirit came from (the stomach)...an Aboriginal person can will themselves to die when the Ngarlu has been broken or weakened and is very sorrowful’ (cited in Dudgeon et.al., 2000, pp. 395–401). Roe speaks of this approach as being about “Keeping the spirit strong.” Roe recognized that this concept of the spirit is a shared perspective across Aboriginal groups. This view of the spirit was reiterated during this and other research cited in this thesis, (see Local Audits and Research Projects in this chapter). The spirit also featured during a Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) conference presentation by three Central Australian Ngangkari (traditional healers). These Elders spoke of being born with the spirit that holds itself in culture and language. “When children become sick/sad, it is because their spirit has gone. If a child is hit or hurt, their spirit becomes misplaced and uncentred. They lose their sense of self” (Tjilari, Ginger & Peters, SNAICC Conference, 2010).

Spirit was also referred to in the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997) as the quote below demonstrates:

“I looked at the place (the orphanage) in my Aboriginal spirit and I felt frightened because this place here, there was a lot of wrong spirit around the place” (Mellor, 2002, p. 61).

Trudgen explores Yolgnu history within Herman's PTSD trauma framework:

'The depths of despair that Yolgnu have reached in their relationship with the dominant culture. They are 'captives', almost totally dependent on the dominant culture for all their needs. The dominant culture now creates and controls the world that has collapsed in on Yolgnu. The dominant culture has become the perpetrator, coercively controlling Yolgnu... In each generation, Yolgnu lose more and more of their true identity as they become what the perpetrator wants them to be... Yolgnu are only needed by the dominant culture for their land, resources and 'culture' for tourism' (Trudgen, 2000, p. 195).

Studies in the USA have found that there are much higher rates of PTSD and anxiety disorders amongst First Nation citizens in the USA (O'Neill, 1998; Gagne, 1998). The *Bringing Them Home Report* and subsequent publications attest to the probability that similar high levels of PTSD, anxiety disorders and exposure to prolonged intergenerational trauma exists for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

A Government study in 2008, funded by the National Drug and Law Enforcement Research Fund focused on Darwin city increasing numbers of long grassers (Holmes & McRae-Williams, 2009)⁹. The study was conducted in several stages. Using the Australian Aboriginal Version of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, the study examined the level of exposure to trauma events and trauma symptoms experienced by sixty Aboriginal people who were part of the initial one hundred and twenty two Aboriginal long grass participants. The study found that although levels of trauma experience were exceptionally high (over three-quarters) among this cohort, many did not become PTSD symptomatic. The study sought to further explain this in terms of resilience but another explanation for this apparent 'resilience' may relate to the high levels of reported alcohol use among the study population as a form of self-medication management (Holmes & McRae-Williams, 2009).

⁹ Memmott and Fantin (2001) interviewed Cummings, B., on 2/05/2000. Ms. Cummings described Darwin long grassers as:

- (1) Those who have come to town to have a good time socialising and drinking and who are prepared to do this in 'long grass style' (camping out); but whom intend to eventually return home.
- (2) Those who live a permanent long grass lifestyle; have cut off their ties with home communities long ago, and who accept that their lifestyle will remain consistent. (Barb Cummings, p.c., 2/5/00)

Consistent with the literature on the subject, an Australian study found a significant association between individuals with PTSD and substance use disorder, particularly alcohol (Mills, Teesson, Ross & Peters, 2006). They observed that those with a substance use disorder and PTSD had significantly poorer physical and mental health and greater disability than those with a substance use disorder alone (Mills et. al., 2006).

Mills et al., (2006) stressed the importance of assessing individuals entering substance use treatment programs for comorbid PTSD. They concluded that, 'individuals with comorbid substance use disorder plus PTSD demonstrate a significant challenge to treatment providers and are likely to require substantial clinical resources' (2006, p. 656) and recommended that both disorders be treated concurrently. They argued that there was limited knowledge on effective treatments for comorbid PTSD and substance use disorders and recognised the need for further research in this area (Holmes & McRae-Williams, 2009, p. 46).

Interestingly fifty-three percent of the sample studied were adopted or fostered out as children, eighty-five percent had experienced numerous family and community deaths in one year, eighty percent were affected by family violence and over half having had bad experiences with the police, government welfare agencies including the housing commission (66.7%) and losing some or all of their traditional language and ceremony (51.7%) (Holmes &McRae-Williams, 2008, p. 41).

Difference within Difference

Some argue that the essentialist notion or concept of fixed or core identity is also embedded in western notions about culture. There have been challenges to the western notion of placing the cultural other into groups, in that, it begins from an assumption about the singularity of distinctive groups. There is '...an assumed homogeneity which is articulated on behalf of the interests of dominant cultures and diasporic groups alike, although for conflicting political and cultural purposes' (Luke & Luke, 1998, p. 729). They go on to question the use of birthplace as an indicator, as used in Federal Government Census surveys, as '[I]t locates identity and difference in 'place' of origin, while the absence of research on the complexities and hybridity of difference colludes in this reductionism' (1998, p. 731).

To make the point Luke and Luke use the example of Malaysia as a birthplace, which tells little about the cultural background in that the individual could be Malay, Chinese, Indian, British or a mixture. Within the Australian context the demographic and policy classification as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) or non-English speaking background (NESB), could be used to classify several of the individuals listed above. The reductionist nature of classifications has a political intent in that Anglo Australian people are marked as 'unraced' and all 'others' as visibly different (1998, p. 731). Gardiner and Bourke question the validity of the Australian census when it comes to asserting Indigenous identity,

'Asserted and even assertive Aboriginal identity is not necessarily congruent with marking a box on a census form, especially if there is any suspicion about the way in which the information might be used' (cited in Gray, 1997, p. 2).

The same could be said of the term Indigenous used to group many different Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and sometimes Australian South Sea Islander people together. In Queensland alone approximately twenty-six different Aboriginal tribal groups have been identified.

Within the context of this thesis, a case file audit within the Department of Families Queensland (Moss, 2003) revealed that in almost all case files viewed, culture was only named if the child was Indigenous. In line with this hypothesis, white or non-Indigenous children remained 'unraced'. Differences between cultures among those who identify as Indigenous remained undifferentiated in practice. Hall argues that identity is a political construct and cultural identities are not 'essences' but 'positionings' that are produced in the continuous play of 'history, culture and power' (Hall, 1994, p. 18).

When faced with multiculturalism, it is argued that people create their own sense of identity through interplay with the dominant cultural discourses. A study by Luke and Luke, of culture in Darwin in the Northern Territory, revealed that several older men and women of mixed Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South East Asian ancestry referred to themselves as 'coloured' in that it was the terminology they constructed for themselves to mark their difference from 'black' Aborigines.

The study explores the interplay of race, gender and class in forming identity within the context of the Darwin community and in doing so reveals how identity was constantly being reworked by these individuals to be inclusive of different aspects at different times in order to confer the most benefit (Luke & Luke 1998). More recently, it has been suggested that some groups deploy “strategic essentialism” where a group agrees upon a uniform identity to achieve interim political goals, without implying any deeper authenticity (Spivak 1990, p. 1–16). Others argue that a relational social ontology, which highlights the fluidity and interdependence of social groups, should be developed as an alternative (Young 2000; Nelson 2001).

Meredith explores Homi Bhabha’s notion of hybridity from a bicultural Aotearoa/New Zealand perspective. Cultural politics has concentrated on binaries, either/or, which is built on the premise of exclusion and purity. Binary notions of the colonised and coloniser he charges with being over-simplified and essentialist in nature. ‘Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity emerges from the interweaving of elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity.’ Bhabha contends that ‘All forms of culture are continually in the process of hybridity’ (Meredith, 1998, p. 2). Thus any notion to suggest the existence of an authentic or essentialist cultural identity lacks validity.

Bhabha locates a post-colonial position in between the coloniser and the colonised. Here is the site where new identities are formed in the space-in-between and can disrupt and displace colonial narratives or cultural structures and practices (Bhabha 1996). It is here that the boundaries between cultures become disrupted. Root discusses the effect of racial discriminations for adolescents from mixed-parentage in that they are usually not accepted by either ethnic group (Root, 1992). British researchers have also explored the correlation between racial identification and self-esteem. To Banks ‘for Black adolescents being Black is a significant factor in the construction of self’ (Banks, 1992, p. 20).

There has been limited research into the prevalence of multi-racial children in the child protection system generally. One American study looked at the comparative prevalence of interracial children in the welfare system and compared the actual risk

assessments for children to ascertain if they were the same as those assessments given to Caucasian families (Fusco, 2010). Fusco, also highlights that research regarding identity determination has focused on interracial adoptions and black-white intermarried couples. 'Less clear is how children born to custodial white mothers fit into an existing racial category and how this may associate with factors known to predict involvement in the child welfare system' (Fusco, 2010, p. 441). Upon analysis of the literature that was available, Fusco found that interracial couples were frequently ostracised by their families, are more likely to experience intimate partner violence, with children experiencing more racism in the school yard than children of other races, whilst a Caucasian mother with a African partner will be subject to racism via verbally abusive remarks about her sexual relationship. One of the themes to emerge from the analysis was '...that of the social worker's understanding of the attitudes that the mother held about race and what this meant for the child's identity' (Fusco, 2010, p. 442).

Theories and perceptions about children and childhood have also influenced western constructs of identity formation and these shall next be explored within the child protection framework.

Models of Childhood

'Throughout history and in contemporary western society, children have been variously constructed as inherently good and innocent or bad and evil. Whilst childhood innocence has dominated, the idea of the evil child has continued to co-exist and has served as a useful 'other' construct for children whose behaviour belies the notion of innocence' (Mitchell, 2005, p. 6).

Mitchell historically links this construct of the child as inherently innocent, as occurring prior to the seventeenth century when Christian Puritanism linked the child to the notion of 'original sin'. The notion of childhood innocence again gained popularity in Victorian nineteenth century as did its nemesis, the evil child, in the twentieth century (2005). In 1968, Sir Rhodes Boyson, British Conservative MP declared that *"children are not born good, they have to be disciplined, otherwise they are a threat to society"* (Hollan, 1992). The idea of children needing strict discipline and punishment in order not to *"spoil the child"* is still voiced today (Mitchell, 2005, p. 6).

Over the last two decades there have been some shifts in thinking that have influenced the way we perceive childhood and view children's place in society. The first of these is the development of the children's rights movement. This movement was given extra credibility and momentum in 1989 by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Australia ratified in January 1991.

The convention highlights the rights of the child by promoting basic standards of well-being within the domains of: *Rights to Life* (Article 6), *Cultural Identity* (Article 8), *Health* (Article 24), *Adequate Living Standards* (Article 27), *Education* (Article 28) and *Protection from Exploitation* (Article 32) (UNICEF, 1989).

The second development has been the change in how childhood is conceptualised, stemming from the constructivist approach in developmental psychology and what is sometimes referred to as the 'new sociology of childhood' (Noble-Carr, 2006).

This new approach has shifted the traditional view of children as 'adults in waiting', to seeing children as a diverse group of active social actors who are valuable contributors to society and competent in voicing their experiences¹⁰.

These changes in the way children and childhood are viewed have led to some governments, organisations and service systems involved in children's lives, to seek the children's ideas on issues that directly affect them and to find ways to enable their active participation in decision making processes (Noble-Carr, 2006). However, although these trends have changed some areas of policy and practice, Winter argues that current models of childhood utilised in child protection are still very much based on notions of passivity, which disqualifies children as active agents. Underpinning much of social work practice in child protection in Queensland at the time was a particular model of childhood, steeped in Developmental Theory, which emphasises 'universal and invariant age-related developmental stages' (Winter, 2006, p. 26). The practice framework for children who are looked after by the state is based on a paradigm that embodies the dominant adult view about children and childhood (Winter, 2006).

10 Similarly, Australian Common Law itself historically placed children as possessions and were commonly thought of as unreliable witnesses before the Law. Given the legislative basis of child protection, it is of no surprise that a similar assumption is made about children across both sectors.

This is particularly the case for younger children as, *‘[t]he construction of childhood within the traditional paradigm institutionalises asymmetry in adult-child relations so that children are necessarily subordinated to more powerful adults by the characterisation of childhood as a period of deficit-immaturity, dependency and weakness, in comparison to normative adulthood’* (Mason, 2000, pp. 34–35). This conceptualisation of childhood enables children’s perspectives to be ‘interpreted by intermediaries, mothers, fathers and various professional experts such as social workers, teachers and psychologists’, who as Oakley notes, ‘all have stake in the business of knowing about children’ (Mason, 2000, p. 31). The concept of “in the best interest of the child”, as explored in Key Concepts, is an oft utilised phase within child protection in order to give substance and legitimacy to decisions made on behalf of the child.

There are numerous studies, for example Butler, Robinson and Scanlan (2005), Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) that utilise qualitative interviews with young people along with play-based methodologies with children in care. However, within the context of this research these methodologies were rarely utilised by child protection case workers.

Jenks notes, that in line with Developmental Theory, children are viewed by adults as ‘less than fully human, unfinished or incomplete’ (199, p. 21). Mason argues that the ‘three concepts that are central to Developmental Theory’ in turn ‘underlies the construction of childhood in the dominant paradigm.’

These are:

- conceptualisation of children as becoming;
- the notion of the universal child; and
- the emphasis on the normative family as the mechanism for ensuring development of children into mature, acceptable adults’ (2000, p. 28).

It is also noted that these theories are devised by adults for adults.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory played a central role in social work practice in Queensland at the time the research was undertaken. It has become 'one of the most influential models guiding parent-child relationship programs of prevention, treatment, and education, including programs for Aboriginal parents' (Neckaway, 2007, p. 65). The central premise of Attachment Theory is that 'attachment is biologically based and represents a child's instinctual need for a reliable, ongoing relationship with a primary caregiver and that if this attachment was interrupted, lacking or lost, lasting emotional damage could occur.' This theory was further extended by devising empirical measures (Neckaway, 2007, p. 66). Attachment theories were later reworked by Rutter (1978) and Bowlby (1979) to incorporate other important relationships. Schaffer and Emerson (1964) contested that by 18 months of age very few children were attached to only one person.

A number of researchers have criticised attachment theories underlying assumptions as being based on western ideologies, regarding ideal dyadic relationships and preferred developmental outcomes based on the mother/infant bond (McShane & Hastings, 2004; Rothbaum et. al., 2000). For instance, not all cultures expect mothers to be the sole caregiver (Bournstien, 1992), nor do all cultures interpret the child's needs in the same way (Sagi, 1990), or have the same reactions to emotional expressions, such as the meaning of an infant's cry (Neckaway, 2007, p. 28). It appears that this over-emphasis on Attachment Theory works to undervalue sociological, anthropological and culturally based theories.

The dyadic nature of the theories' central attachment figure also comes in to question if one is to consider the communal nature of Indigenous parenting. Although Neckaway was referring to Native American Aboriginals in their paper, the same could be said for Indigenous Australians in that, these families *'do not adhere to the linear sequence of the mother as sole contributor to the child's physical and emotional well-being...Aboriginal concepts of the family range from the extended family concept, where lineage and bloodlines are important, to the wider view where clans, kin, and totems can include Elders, leaders, and communities'* (Okpik, 2005; Red Horse, 1980). *'These community members all*

share a collective responsibility for the care and nurturing of the child...The bond between the child and the parent and other caregivers in Aboriginal culture, therefore, is multi-layered rather than dyadic'(Neckaway, 2007, p. 70). The mother/infant bond in Attachment Theory is linear in that it does not consider wider social relationships except to suggest that this diad becomes a template for all future relationships.

It is also argued that the collective nature of Aboriginal family life that emphasises independence and autonomy in child-rearing can influence how Aboriginal children express attachment (Lynch, 2001; Ralph, 1998). Ralph explores the important notion of affiliation to Aboriginal families however in terms of Aboriginal child-rearing practices affiliation can be considered very important (Ralph, 1998). It is through these affiliations and family networks that attachment within the child's specific cultural context is expressed.

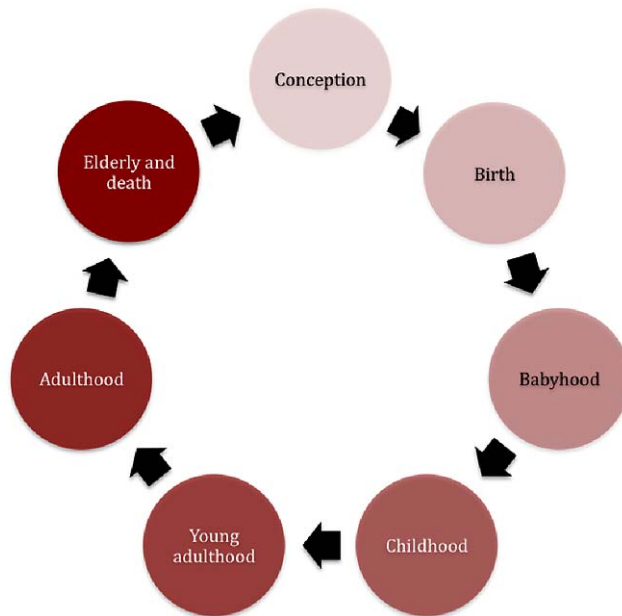
It is therefore interesting to consider how universalised assumptions about attachment may influence decision making in child protection practice.

Circles and Lines

Circles feature prominently in Indigenous culture, art and language, unlike the linear nature of western-based constructs of identity formation and scientific theories. Martin discusses this further by bringing the notion of the circle into identity theory, which by its very nature is inclusive.

'Circles embrace because when you stand in a circle you can be seen and everyone else can see you. There is no starting point or end point in a circle and therefore all things have an equal and valid place where there is no 'other' but you are regarded as 'another'. The processes (of identity) are ones of engagement and extensions, not binary oppositions that engenders exclusion, isolation and separation and the notion of difference being deficient' (Martin, 2005, p. 31).

Martin's model is placed within its true circular context in the diagram below.



It is important to acknowledge that the Aboriginal model is cyclical and hence does not lend itself well to a linear format below, nor could Erikson's theory take on a cyclical format. Additionally it is pertinent to note that as evidenced in this research, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander child protection workers consider that this Aboriginal model does "not quite fit" for their cultures and that further work needs to be done to arrive at working models for their cultures.

The Aboriginal model above is a spiritual model, built on reciprocal responsibilities and relatedness. This relatedness extends further than the extended family as it incorporates everything that exists within the circle and everything is guided by the spirit. In contrast, the western model is very linear and is set within the medical model of normative age-based development, which ultimately leads to detachment from the nuclear family during adolescence.

Table 1, juxtaposes Martin's Aboriginal model (SNAICC, 2005, p. 38) with Erikson's (1968) developmental model, which, as will be seen in this research, is still utilised within western social work practice.

Table 1: Martin versus Erikson

Stage	Aboriginal Model (Martin,2005, p. 38)	Age	Developmental Theory (Erikson,1968)
Conception	Parents give function and service to the spirit of the child so that the spirit emerges. Parents prepare for the changes that will occur to 'grow-up' the child's spirit.	0-1	Trust versus Mistrust Awareness of self versus other
Birth	Preparation for the arrival of the spirit of the child.	1-3	Autonomy versus Shame & Doubt Growing separateness & individuation
Babyhood	Introduction of the family to the child	3-5	Initiative versus Guilt Increased differentiation & rivalry
Childhood	Signified by physical maturation. Child viewed as capable, autonomous and an active contributor. Regulates own behaviour and building on reciprocating relatedness to others. Introduced to the elements such as the land, animals, spirits etc.	6 - puberty	Industry versus Inferiority
Young adulthood	Continuum from childhood. Experiences the world in ever increasing sets of relatedness being guided by other people and other elements especially the spirits.	adolescence	Identity versus Identity diffusion Detachment from family
Adulthood	Different experiences of relatedness through roles of other people. Emersion in relatedness to people, country, nature and spirit.	early adulthood 19-40	Intimacy versus Isolation
Adulthood	As above	40-65	Generosity versus Stagnation
Elderly and death	As above. Rebirth	65 - death	Integrity versus Despair

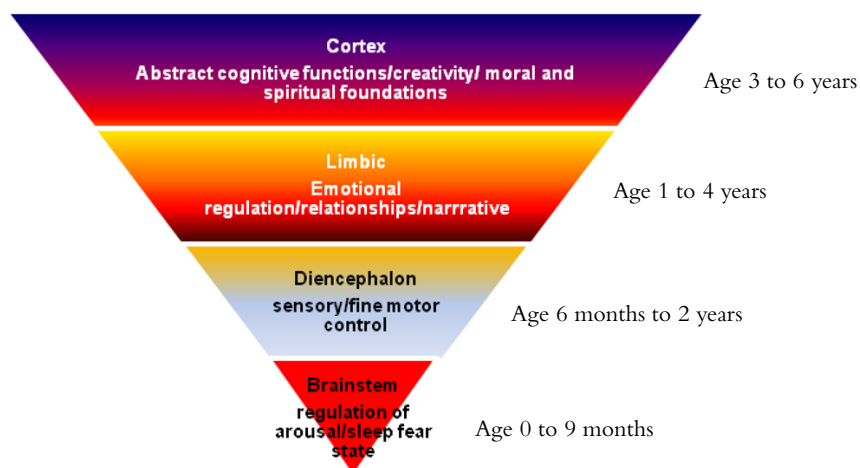
Neglect and Identity

Neglect, as described in Abbreviations, Key Words and Concepts, is included as an abuse type within the child protection system. For Maslow (1943), in his hierarchical model, when a need is mostly satisfied it no longer motivates and the next higher need takes its place. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is shown in the following diagram (University of Tasmania, 2010).



Within this staged model the effects of poverty make achieving a sense of identity or self-actualisation impossible, and in this context identity is viewed as a higher level need. Although inverted, Perry's Neurobiological Theory of Brain Development echoes Maslow's theory (1943).

As referenced briefly in Abbreviations, Key Terms and Concepts, the category neglect in child protection is considered problematic. A study by Malin, Campbell and Agius (1996) demonstrated the way some cultural characteristics such as encouraging self-reliance, self-regulation and independence in children of Aboriginal families (Nunga), was viewed negatively by non-Indigenous families. For example a young child briefly wandering around out of sight of the mother was viewed as neglectful. Hence, 'while definitions of abuse are more easily applied across cultures, definitions of neglect are more subjective, malleable, and culturally particular' (Long & Sephton, 2011).



According to Perry (2006), neglect and abuse both inhibit sequential brain development from the brainstem to the limbic and cortex. Indeed in many cases neglect and abuse happen nonconcurrently, further compounding developmental delays. To Perry, '[f]or maltreated children, developmental 'age' rarely matches chronological age; therefore, the sequential provision of therapeutic experiences should be matched to developmental stage and not chronological age' (Perry, 2006, p. 41). In practice this means that the therapeutic response must consider developmental age and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptomatology. Therapies thus need to incorporate what we know about sensory development¹¹.

¹¹ By way of example, if a child experiences severe trauma when they are under a year old, their basic functions of arousal and fear are likely impaired. At this age the senses most utilised to make sense of their world are smell, touch, taste and hearing. In order to encourage brainstem growth and encourage sensory development, therapeutic responses need to involve the use of these senses (Perry, 2006).

Identity formation, as an abstract concept it seems would sit within the development of the cortex which is reliant upon successful networking from the brainstem, hence identity impairment or confusion would ensue if successful pathways are not made.

The evolution of identity theory as demonstrated above has been influenced by a number of different agendas with major consequences for children generally, but even more so for children in out of home care. The fundamental underlying assumptions about identity and children run contrary to Indigenous knowledge and current research findings on children, young people and participation.

Whilst this chapter has explored a range of theories about identity and childhood and, in particular those theories that have influenced social work practice in child protection, the following chapter explores the contextual specificity of the research itself. It looks historically at the unique cultural mix of the research site along with the legislative, and systemic context surrounding this particular child protection regional office at a particular point in time.

Chapter Three

Child Protection Systemic Context

Whilst the previous chapter explored some of the theoretical positions that have informed our understanding of identity over the years, this chapter considers the systemic, political and historical context that both informs and drives the child protection system. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to explore the legal, social, political, research and systemic environment that were pivotal to both informing and creating child protection casework practice, in one specific region of Queensland Australia, at a particular point in time.

Central coastal Queensland, which is the setting of this research, is considered regional with the town of Mackay being the service hub for the region. Mackay is 972.3 kms away from Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland. Surrounding Mackay are smaller satellite towns and cane farms. Smaller communities surround these towns, which encompass hinterlands and mountain ranges. The area is coal rich, hence the growth of the area with miners and their families settling in the area in order to work the mines and the coal loading facilities. The Whitsunday area is also a tourist hub with a young, transient population and large influxes of tourists, with Arlie Beach providing one of the major access points to the Great Barrier Reef and the Whitsunday Islands.

By exploring briefly, past legislative practices and social attitudes within the broader national context, the scene will be set to look more specifically at Queensland. It is also important to look historically at how the racial cultural mix occurred within the region studied, in that it marks the region as unique in its cultural heritage. The impact of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997), the *CMC Inquiry* (2004) and *A Blueprint* (2004), along with the constantly changing and politically charged child protection system itself, are further explored on a macro level, by looking at how these reports appeared to effect practice in the region studied. Other systems such as education and mental health are also briefly explored in as far as these systems have direct impact upon service provision for children in the care system.

As mentioned in the introduction, this research was also part of a wider research partnership between the School of Social Work and Community Welfare Department at James Cook University and the Mackay/Whitsunday region of the Queensland Department of Families, as part of ARC funding grant. The partnership conducted a number of research initiatives whilst regionally promoting quality improvement and evidence based practice within the local child protection system. I was thus able to draw on the knowledge created by this rich research environment. This chapter explores some of the findings that came out of the research partnership and in so doing highlights many of the complexities surrounding the child protection system.

Past Legislative Practices

Contemporary child protection systems historically originated in the 1960 (Kempe, 1962) and were established to respond to incidences of child physical abuse. These systems were reactive by nature, crisis driven and forensically focused. In time, the remit was extended to incorporate the other forms of child abuse such as sexual, emotional abuse and neglect (Queensland Peakcare, 2007). The Australian child protection system is highly influenced by the UK system, which is not surprising given its legislative historical context. Covert and overt racism within the UK child protection system was exposed in 1984 as a consequence of the *Black and In Care* (1984) report, furthermore subsequent qualitative studies found that both institutional and personal racism within the care system restricted the development of a positive black identity (Ince, 1998, p. 82). To Robinson (1995), through racial prejudice, young black people in both the USA and the UK are continually subjected to derogatory views and negative self-images projected through the media, through institutions and dominant discourse. Indigenous people in Australia share this legacy with a history of legislative and institutional practices that embedded racial prejudice under the guise of paternalistic practice.

The history of Australian Aboriginals after colonisation is well documented and each state and territory followed similar patterns of legislative change. Legislation in Queensland in the 1890's involved the forced relocation of the majority of Aboriginal groups and families from their traditional lands onto government reserves or church run missions.

Many families were split up and sent to different reserves. These reserves were established via legislation, that is, the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, and the majority of Aboriginal people became wards of the state and had to have work permits to work outside of the reserves. The *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act 1939*, superceded the former act and required Aboriginals to gain permission from the Chief Protector to marry. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 1965* replaced the 1939 Act and with the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA), directed efforts into the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the mainstream. 'In 1971, the first formal recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are actually quite distinct and separate was reflected in the passing of the *Queensland Aborigines Act 1971* and *Queensland Torres Strait Island Act 1971*. ...In 1978 the word assimilation was dropped in favour of 'integration' (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development Information, 1998, pp. 11-12).

In 1968 the print media reported that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (DAA) was claiming wide spread trafficking of Aboriginal children. The report cited some three hundred known cases whereby Aboriginal children were being illegally adopted into Anglo families. Many of these children had arrived on holiday programs and were sent to live with white families 'living in deplorable conditions. Some in families with as many as fifteen Aboriginal children along with their own – and had been passed between (white) families so that their parents lost track of them.' A number of children from interstate had been left behind by organisers of holiday schemes with many carers refusing to hand over the children placed with them. Worthy, the then Director of the DAA expressed concern for these children:

'I'm afraid it has almost become fashionable for a family to have an Aboriginal child. There is a big risk the child might become to regard himself on the same level as the family pet...I know of cases of children being brought to Melbourne from North Queensland. They couldn't adapt to the big city and a different climate. Some have drifted back and they can't settle down in their old community' (Herald Melbourne, 25/6/1968 cited in Haebich, 2001, p. 578).

From the onset, paternalistic ideals about being able to provide better care for Aboriginal children who, by mainstream standards, were living in poverty resulted in large numbers of removals and interstate transfers of children.

The Problem with Neglect

As outlined in Abbreviations, Key Terms and Concepts, neglect is one of the abuse types embedded within child protection legislation in Australia. By definition neglect constitutes a failure to provide conditions that are essential for the healthy physical and emotional development of a child (Tomison & Poole, 2000). The enactment and interpretation of neglect historically has been highly problematic. As explored in the last chapter the different premise by which childhood is viewed, informs parenting practices in the Indigenous cultural context. Ultimately this means that Indigenous families are assessed by child protection agencies via the lens of a professional, non-Indigenous, middle-class world view.

Dr. P. M. Moodie, School of Medicine, University of Sydney stated, *“Aboriginal infant deaths represented ten percent of all such deaths in Australia, when Aborigines constituted only one percent of the national population. The main causes of infant death are listed as dysentery, gastroenteritis, flu and pneumonia, neonatal disease, premature birth, post-natal asphyxia and injury during birth. The casual factors were poor living conditions, malnutrition and low standards of child care and personal hygiene”* (*The Age Melbourne* 27/06/1965 cited in Haebich, 2001, p. 588). According to Dr. J. McFarlane, Queensland Director of Maternal Medicine, ‘[t]he greatest risk to infants was during the period from six months to three years as the supply of breast milk decreased causing protein calorie malnutrition syndrome resulting in retarded growth’ (*Sunday Mail* 18/06/1972 cited in Haebich, 2001, p. 590). More recently ‘Failure to Thrive’ has been incorporated into the definition of neglect. The definition of growth failure related to aberrant care giving is the failure to maintain a pre-established pattern of growth as a consequence of development that responds to the provision of adequate nutritional and emotional needs of the child. Yet, most cases of ‘Failure to Thrive’ are not related to neglectful care giving (Block & Krebs, 2005).

Sadly, little has changed with many Aboriginal people across Australia still living in conditions of extreme poverty especially in remote areas. In 1969, an ABC television *Four Corners* documentary ‘*Out of Sight, Out of Mind*’ shocked mainstream Australia into recognising the severity of the poverty issue when it depicted the living conditions of twenty-nine year old Mrs. Nancy Jones, who had been convicted for the manslaughter of her baby. Mrs. Jones lived in a town camp near a prosperous Queensland cattle region. She lived in an overcrowded, (4 adults and 10 children) small tin shack. The camp was located next to the sewage outlet, had only one communal bore and a couple of pit toilets, not surprisingly it was also home to swarms of flies and mosquitoes, which resulted in high illness and mortality rates. Like many women at the time, Mrs. Jones had been encouraged to bottle feed her babies with dried unmodified cow’s milk and, as a single mother with little income and five children (she had ten children in all, but five were in foster care) to feed, it is unlikely that she had the means to provide her children with a healthy diet. At the inquest, the cause of death was stated to be pneumonia and malnutrition. It was four months after the inquest, when she returned to hospital with another sick child, that she was arrested for manslaughter of her baby (Haebich, 2001, p. 585).

In 2010 television audiences were still shocked to see the level of poverty in remote Aboriginal Northern Territory communities and town camps, where overcrowding and substandard living conditions continue to plague whole communities. The only place to buy food on most communities, (as there is usually only one shop), results in (often less than) fresh produce being priced at double that in urban towns, with more unhealthy alternatives such as fried take-away foods being a cheaper option. Unemployment is exceptionally high, with very few real employment opportunities on the actual communities. Sadly it seems, as demonstrated above, little has changed in this forty year span in terms of conditions for many Aboriginal people. The accumulative effect of intergenerational neglect based on poverty, overcrowding and poor sanitation continues to be an issue today.

As discussed in more detail below, the main reason for taking Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander children into care in the Mackay and Whitsunday region is neglect (McMahon, 2002). This category of abuse is contentious in that the systemic social and health issues that may lay at the foundation of neglect, are relegated under the same banner as other forms of abuse: 'being unable or unwilling to protect'. This term is utilised by child protection within an adversarial legal system which, essentially apportion blame in order to substantiate harm and/or risk of future harm to allow the removal of a child from parental custody. The only way a parent can reduce the adversarial nature of the process, is to admit that they are unable to protect their child.

The complexities around defining neglect are also well documented. 'National and international child protection literature notes the way in which neglect involves harm over prolonged periods of time. The literature describes neglect as often long term, chronic, cumulative, recurrent and unremitting' (OCYFC, ACT, 2010). Adding to this complexity is the cultural relativism that may alter the way in which practitioners interpret neglect dependent on the cultural background of a child (Tomison, 1995) Workers may be faced with the dilemma of removal versus family preservation.

Understandably child protection workers struggle with how to effect change to lower risk of harm, in families where poverty is the central area of concern resulting in neglect. Poverty by nature can result in homelessness, 'Failure to Thrive' in children and poor health outcomes generally. It is arguable as to whether, in the main, neglect through poverty would be better serviced through health departments, social support services and increased infrastructure, as welfare departments are not equipped to deliver effective and intensive family support services.

Indigenous Cultural History in the Queensland Context

At the time of European settlement in Australia in the 1700s, Indigenous people across the continent spoke an estimated two hundred and fifty languages. Some of these are still spoken today, but most have become extinct or are in danger of disappearing (Australian Government, 2008). The cultural diversity across the entire

State of Aboriginal Queensland was evidenced in the variety of beliefs, customs, lore (law) and cultural systems. Queensland Aboriginals refer to themselves as Murri, with songlines and clan connections across Australia.

Torres Strait, which lies between Cape York and Papua and New Guinea, is legally part of Queensland since the islands were annexed and, as a result, the Islanders became British Subjects and the islands became Crown Land. Those islands within a sixty nautical mile radius of the coast were annexed in 1872, the remainder in 1879. Hundreds of islands comprise the Torres Strait archipelago with many in the past being inhabited, today this has been reduced to eighteen communities on seventeen Islands. At Federation (1901), they became Australian citizens with limited rights. 'The majority of Torres Strait Islanders have always lived in Queensland. The 1996 census figures enumerated a total Torres Strait Islander population of 28,744 but this figure does not include people who claim dual Islander/Aboriginal identity' (Brandle, 2001, p. 21). Brandle goes on to state that pre-contact with the British, Torres Strait Islanders did not consider themselves an homogenous or unified group. In terms of language and culture, the Islanders belong to five distinct groups based on their place of origin, language and customs. This irreparably changed in the late 1800s with the transportation of Pacific Island workers to Queensland:

'Between 1863 and 1904 some 62,000 Pacific Islanders, ethnic Melanesians, who were known as 'Kanakas' (the Hawaiian name for boy) or as 'Pacific Island labourers' were taken to Queensland as indentured workers. The technique of recruiting and trafficking the 'Kanakas' was widely described as 'blackbirding'; a term derived from the unfortunate inhabitants of Africa's West Coast, who were sold as slaves to America and the West Indies' (Brandle, 2001, p. 36).

Originally South Sea Islanders came from over eighty different islands, however since the turn of the 1900s the majority in Queensland come from the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands. The 'Kanakas' were first utilised as labourers in the cotton industry but with this industry's decline, they were sent to work in the sugar cane industry. Less than eight percent of South Sea Islanders were female, resulting in a severe gender imbalance with significant family repercussions (Brandle, 2001, p. 36).

A high level of intermarriage with Anglo, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occurred from the onset. The Mackay region is the microcosm of this effect given that it holds the largest number of Australian South Sea Islanders in the country.

Bringing Them Home

*As a young preacher I used to ride,
My quiet pony around the countryside,
In the native camp I'll never forget,
A young black mother,
Her cheeks so wet.
Between her sobs I heard her say,
Police been tak'em my baby away,
From white man boss that baby I had,
Why he let'em take baby away?
Ya-weh, Ya-weh, My brown skin baby they take him away,
To a children's home a baby came,
With new clothes on and a new name.
Day and night he would always say,
'Mummy, Mummy why they take me away?
Ya-weh, ya-weh, My brown-skin baby they take him away* (Lyrics by Bob Randall, 1994).

Randall's¹² song, *Brown Skin Baby* (they take him away), pre-empted the outpouring of stories of grief and loss by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made possible by the *Bringing Them Home* report. The *Bringing Them Home* report, commissioned by Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in 1997, provided a public space, for the first time, for the stories of people who were separated from their families as part of the Stolen Generation¹³, to be heard. It also provided a raft of recommendations to ensure human rights outcomes were achieved (HREOC, 1997). Haebich (2001), explores the notion of collective trauma and points out that 'Individual silences over personal experiences associated with national traumas are a further aspect of national 'forgetting' (Haebich, 2001).

12 Randall is a Yankunytjatjara Elder and Traditional Owner from the Uluru area of Central Australia

13 It is estimated that 100,000 Indigenous children were taken from their families and raised in homes or adopted by white families, up until the 1960s. <http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/stolen-generations>

For some, the pain was so great it was beyond words:

'Aboriginal women were unwilling and unable to speak about the immense pain, grief and anguish that losing their children had caused them. That pain was so strong that we were unable to find a mother who had healed enough to be able to speak, and to share her experience with us and the commission' (HREOC,1997, p. 21).

One of the major recommendations to come out of the report was national standards in the implementation of the principle to be followed when placing Indigenous children into foster care.

The following is the relevant excerpt from the *Crime and Misconduct Commission Report*:

Standard 6: Indigenous Child Placement Principle

'Recommendation 51a: That the national standards legislation provide that, when an Indigenous child must be removed from his or her family, including for the purpose of adoption, the placement of the child, whether temporary or permanent, is to be made in accordance with the Indigenous Child Placement Principle.

Recommendation 51b: Placement is to be made according to the following order of preference,

- 1. placement with a member of the child's family (as defined by local custom and practice) in the correct relationship to the child in accordance with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander law,*
- 2. placement with a member of the child's community in a relationship of responsibility for the child according to local custom and practice,*
- 3. placement with another member of the child's community,*
- 4. placement with another Indigenous carer.*

Recommendation 51c: The preferred placement may be displaced where,

- 1. that placement would be detrimental to the child's best interests,*
- 2. the child objects to that placement, or*
- 3. no carer in the preferred category is available.*

Recommendation 51d: Where placement is with a non-Indigenous carer the following principles must determine the choice of carer,

- 1. family reunion is a primary objective,*
- 2. continuing contact with the child's Indigenous family, community and culture must be ensured, and*
- 3. the carer must live in proximity to the child's Indigenous family and community.*

*Recommendation 51e: No placement of an Indigenous child is to be made except on the advice and with the recommendation of the appropriate accredited Indigenous organisation. Where the parents or the child disagree with the recommendation of the appropriate accredited Indigenous organisation.'*¹⁴

Conway and Hutson in the USA did a comparative study of children placed in foster care and children placed with kinship carers. They found that children placed with kinship carers:

- had fewer placement changes;
- were less likely to re-enter foster care after periods of being reunited with their birth parents;
- were more likely to be kept with their siblings;
- had better scores on a range of physical, cognitive and skill-based domains; and
- had more positive perceptions of their placements.

Although long overdue in helping to ensure familial and cultural considerations for Indigenous children in care, systemic issues and professional assumptions can and do impede the implementation of the principle (2007, pp. 3-5).

In 2009, the Productivity Commission found that in Queensland, adherence to the *Indigenous Child Placement Principle* was 56.7%.

Concerns for Aboriginal kinship carers were noted in a report by the Social Policy Research Centre that included:

¹⁴ Not all states and territories have accredited Indigenous organisations.

- *'advancing age and health needs which impacted on caring;*
- *aged grandmothers and aunties caring for large sibling groups;*
- *aged grandmothers and aunties with responsibility for chronically-ill spouses as well as kin children.*

Carers lifestyles completely 'turned around' with the demands of, and responsibilities for very young kin children impacting in a detrimental way on their energy and stress levels' (2009, p. 57).

Thus, Aboriginal carers more generally, are often on low incomes, in poor health and caring for a number of children as well as other family members.

As discussed as part of this research, the implementation of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* also proves highly problematic in the context of multi-cultural children as evidenced in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) and A Blueprint

Like every other state in Australia, along with many other western countries, Queensland's child protection system has endured a range of public enquiries and explosive press releases. In 2004, the (then) Department of Families came under extensive scrutiny by the CMC as a consequence of child deaths and allegations of abuse in care. The *Protecting Children an Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care (2004)* occurred as a consequence of press articles in 2003, which outlined alleged abuse of foster children whilst under the care and protection of the State.

The report concluded that:

'Over a long period of time the Queensland child protection system itself has failed to deliver the support and services that are required for children at risk of abuse. Reform is necessary. This report concludes that transformational change is required, and provides a vision for how that might occur' (CMC, 2004, p.V).

The Report also clearly stated the long-term effects and cost of child abuse:

‘Apart from the physical injuries such as bruises, welts, lacerations, and fractures, child maltreatment is associated with a number of long-term consequences such as failure to thrive, cognitive impairment, delays in reaching developmental milestones, refusal to attend school, poor school performance, highly sexualised or highly aggressive behaviours, poor relationships, suicidal behavior and self-harm, criminal activity, an increased likelihood of substance abuse, high risk health behaviours, mental health disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and panic attacks, and an increase likelihood of the cycle of violence with abuse towards their own children and spouse’ (CMC, 2004, p. 1).

Prior to the report, in 2001, the Department of Families conducted its own file audit as part of their quality improvement plan. This review investigated the needs of three hundred and fifty-three children who had left care or were still on Child Protection Orders in Queensland. The review found that children who remained in care for less than two and a half years had better outcomes over a number of indicators such as ‘sexual adjustment, substance abuse, problematic family relationships and social skills’. Listed below are some of the other findings:

- *‘3% of children have extreme needs and 12.4% have high needs;*
- *7% of children have major behavioural /emotional problems that effect functioning capacity and 21% had significant problems, with males displaying higher levels of both behavioural and emotional problems than females;*
- *11% identified as having major sexual adjustment and/or problem sexual behaviours with 2% identified as sexual offenders;*
- *5% had a substance abuse problem;*
- *28% have major conflict and problems in their family relationships,*
- *21% had significant educational needs;*
- *26% (¼) of the Indigenous children in the sample were identified as having limited or non-existent contact with or understanding about their cultural heritage’ (Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2004, p. 2).*

The CMC referred to information from this audit report. It was interesting that on noting the limitations of the audit, the CMC commented that *‘behavioural and emotional problems such as depression, head banging and frequent defiant behavior or disobedient behavior were recorded by reviewers as having no impact on children’s functioning - a coded decision that may be considered by some to be inaccurate, or at the very least to have resulted in an underestimation of the severity of the problems under review’* (2004, p. 3).

Across Australia, there is a lack of placement options for children in the out of home and child protection systems. The CMC report highlighted the hidden issue of children being placed in hotel rooms and caravan parks and it is often the hard-to-place¹⁵ children who are placed in such situations. Given the lack of accommodation in the Mackay/Whitsunday region, such placement types were common¹⁶. Relative or kinship placements were often voluntary, which meant little to no financial support or training from the Department and were typically not monitored. This has particular implications for Indigenous families, where poverty and overcrowding occurs.¹⁷

The *Child Protection Act 1999*, Schedule, s.74 specifies that a child has the right to be consulted about decisions that affect their lives, particularly decisions pertaining to where they live, family contact and their health and schooling. In practice, the CMC found that children were rarely involved in decisions made about their life. Children were being forced to have contact or ‘being denied contact with their family and siblings when they have repeatedly requested this contact’ (2004, p. 215).

15 In my experience as a worker in child protection and out of home care, hard to place children are often those children with behavioural issues. This is particularly the case for children who exhibit aggressive and/or sexualised behaviours whereby care needs are more intense and the safety of other children in the household needs to be considered. These children often experienced many placement breakdowns as a consequence.

16 Mackay’s main industry is coal mining. For the Whitsunday region the main industry is tourism. In both cases there is a severe housing shortage as a result of large population influxes and lack of infrastructure planning resulting in higher rental prices.

17 Adding to the pressure experienced by relative carers is the practice of “humberging.” Traditionally Aboriginal people share resources. If a relative asks for a resource (e.g. money, food, accommodation) you are obliged to share. This often means that those relatives who are employed and have accommodation are continually “humberged” and it is often these same people who take responsibility for looking after the children in the extended family (Kearney, 2007).

Family Services Officers, (which after the CMC inquiry became CSOs) were also examined as part of the inquiry with nearly seventy percent being young females with less than three years experience. What the Inquiry did not highlight was the class, gender, cultural and professional specificity of this cohort of workers, that is, that a large percentage of CSOs are also Anglo, middle class and mainly female social workers. The inquiry found that inexperienced staff were also obtaining supervisory roles.

The subsequent *A Blueprint* contained the implementation plan for the raft of recommendations made by the CMC report. The plan included a move to a more forensic model with the adaptation of *Structured Decision Making* (SDM) tools within the newly created Department of Child Safety (2005)¹⁸. This ‘new start’ as a stand-alone department when established, ‘would not transplant former problems and the negative culture identified as the cause of many problems in the former Department of Families’ (Queensland Government, 2004, p. 5). Recommendations also included improving outcomes for Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect team (SCAN)¹⁹, increased ground staff numbers and a change in Department structure.

An Environment of Constant Change

As a worker in and around child protection since 2001, the scrutiny under which child protection operates, ensures a seemingly constant state of change and restructure. For example, in 2001 the (then) Department of Communities had just changed name and structure to become the Department of Families. Leadership took on a regional base which enabled Regional Directors the scope to direct locally based initiatives.

¹⁸ SDM tools were purchased from America. The tools are meant to increase transparency and accuracy around decision-making in the child protection assessment process. Of concern is the lack of research into the impact of the use of SDM tools on Indigenous people. The tools as such, provide a particular ‘tick and flick’ assessment framework comprising of questions and a graded response, giving the assessment a particular score in order to ascertain level of risk along a continuum, which is then matched with a response. Ultimately the tools are also meant to streamline arduous administrative requirements leaving more time for client-centred casework. One of the only studies conducted by someone other than the company who developed and market SDM tools (SRC) found that the tools were ‘not used to assist decision making of practitioners and consequently was ineffectual in targeting children most in need of a service’ (Gillingham, P., 2009, p. 53)

¹⁹ SCAN teams were formed in 1980 in order to provide a coordinated service response to child abuse notifications. Core members of SCAN include the Department of Families, Queensland Health and Queensland Police. Members can also include Education Queensland and Child and Youth Mental Health. The CMC Inquiry identified several problem areas and operational deficiencies including; lack of accountability, variability in quality and tensions between disciplines that impact upon its effectiveness. It is interesting to note that the SCAN model is not a decision making body when it comes to Child Protection. SCAN can only make recommendations.

After the CMC Inquiry, the name changed again to the Department of Child Safety and with it came a total restructure. This change became highly politicised in that Child Protection came under continual media scrutiny. This coupled with the looming state election, it might be argued, led to a push for expedient outcomes and a fast tracked implementation plan, in order for change to happen over a relatively short space of time. In 2010 the name of the Department changed from the Department of Child Safety to the Department of Communities.

Similarly, during my four years in the Northern Territory a major coronial enquiry has occurred and with it a pending restructure. The name was changed in 2007 to Department of Health and Families, and again in 2011 to Department of Children and Families, as a consequence of the recommendations handed down in October 2010 upon the release of the coronial inquiry report (Northern Territory Government, 2010). In reality, however, both in Queensland and the NT, the Department is still known as “welfare” by the majority of people who come into contact with the Department. How the level of constant change and scrutiny effects the workforce may also be an issue if one is to consider attraction and retention rates in the field.

The CMC Inquiry also found that the culture and ethos of the Department of Families was negative in that it ‘...included poor communication, crisis-driven decision making, a lack of transparency in decision making, poor information technology systems...and a perceived tendency for management to blame frontline staff rather than share accountability’ (2004, p. 143). It appears that every restructure attempts to deal with this endemic issue, albeit with seemingly little change occurring and with ever increasing caseloads.²⁰

The CMC Inquiry also concluded that the grants system for non-government organisations (NGOs) was also found as being ‘not conducive to integrated service delivery and further promotes the use of isolated services’ (2004, p. 176). Child protection and NGO workers, who are funded to provide services to children, undoubtedly work within a highly politicised arena. Funding rounds are often short (six months for a pilot project, to a maximum of one to three years) which usually falls in line with the current political cycle and/or end of financial year imperatives.

20 In the recent *Growing them Strong, Together Report in the NT* (2010), many of these same issues were highlighted.

Successful projects are often abandoned as a consequence of political will and/or the end of a funding round. Funding rounds can be a competitive process for like services. Families and children who are involved in this very complex system, have to not only grapple with the constant change within the Department, from staff turnover to changes in structure, Department name and legislation, but they also have to deal with programs that, even when successful can be discontinued without notice. Worst still, due to the complex nature of the service system between state and federally funded initiatives, there appears to be little coordination or systemic needs response in that there is seemingly little information flow between funded services, or indeed between funding sources. This only adds to the level of mistrust towards the Department.

This lack of long-term vision aligned to political cycles can result in “service fatigue” along with the perception that *“here comes another white mob that won’t follow-through and won’t be around for long”*, which was an oft heard sentiment in my years of working with Indigenous people.²¹ The issue of short-term funding rounds also has a negative impact upon consistency in available referral services for children in care. Funding children in care is in many ways viewed by the Federal Government as a State Government responsibility, given that child protection and community services fall under state legislation. Some federally funded services may not be available to children in the care of the State, (due to the remit of the service excluding children in care). In the context of this research there had been a variety of state funded pilot projects and services that were defunded whilst this research was taking place.

With the commitment of the then Mackay/Whitsunday Regional Manager in 2005, to both the *Future Directions Trials*²² and *Action Research*, two innovative pilot projects were funded. Both of these projects had a direct impact upon the Indigenous community in the study region.

21 This attitude has been highlighted in a small number of communities in the Northern Territory as a consequence of the Federal Intervention. The majority of remote communities and outstations have very limited, to no access to services. Yet a very small number of communities (all are easily accessible from Darwin or Alice Springs) enjoy a plethora of short-term funded services from government (both federal and state funding) and NGOs. There is often a doubling up of services in these instances. In one community for example the General Business Manager (GBM) was trying to coordinate seventy visiting services.

22 *Future Directions* were trials undertaken by the Department of Families prior to the CMC Inquiry. Nine test sites were chosen (of which Mackay / Whitsunday was one). The project trials were researched based with several levels of evaluation.

The *Indigenous Early Intervention and Prevention Program* utilised Indigenous Department workers to work extensively with Indigenous families at the early stages of intervention, that is, prior to court proceedings. The second, the *Reconnect Program*, looked at reconnecting Indigenous children in care with their families and communities. These programs were unique and catered specifically to the local Indigenous population in that both programs were modeled on *Action Research*, with heavy involvement and investment by a number of key Indigenous people in the area. Although each program had an exit strategy, in reality, with the political haste of creating the new Department pending, little thought was given to the effect of defunding another two programs popular with the local Indigenous community. This level of constant change and flux in a Department that deals so intimately with peoples' lives does not auger well for the development of engagement or trust. Again the community was not consulted.²³

The implementation of *A Blueprint* and Child Protection's split with Youth Justice and the Department of Communities, who are delegated with funding and monitoring government funded community based services, had particular implications for the Mackay/Whitsunday regional office. Prior to the split, all of these services were colocated which led to constant dialogue between services. Under regional leadership child protection was able to inform different aspects of the funded service systems and children on dual orders (child protection and youth justice) could be more easily managed and monitored due to the accessibility of workers to each other. With the departmental split, came the need for *Memorandums of Understanding* and inter-departmental communication strategies which, arguably can run contrary to providing cohesive and timely service provision for the children involved.

Child and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

Children as a group generally, interact and become involved with a number of systems throughout childhood and adolescence. For example, all children, at least theoretically, should have some involvement with the health and education systems.

²³ Recently in the NT, in order to help build community trust and confidence post federal intervention, state and federal government departments have devised Local Implementation Plans with 15 'growth communities'. The plans are devised to have a five-year commitment from both state and federal governments, however should either government change prior to end of the five year period the plans can easily be abandoned by the new elected government.

For children who become known to the Department, this involvement over a range of service types and systems generally increases once the child is placed in out of home care. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this can mean negotiating across quite complex systems. The issue here too, is when service provision remains uncoordinated, carers and families are left to negotiate across several systems at one time. This may be particularly problematic when these systems have different and/or competing agendas. As discussed earlier, in Australia this becomes more complicated by the way services are funded via the different layers of governmental funding. Some services are funded federally, whilst others are funded via the state, with very little coordination across jurisdictions to ensure duplication and/or gaps do not occur.

Within Queensland; Health, Education, Disability Services and Child Protection are State jurisdictions dependent upon funding dollars. These government departments co-exist with other non-government services, which are, in the main, funded and monitored by these Government Departments. On a regional level these services experience skills shortages along with staff retention issues. Funding and staffing issues can and do play themselves out when trying to case manage children across services.

Child and Youth Mental Health facilities will only service children with certain diagnosis. How the children who fall outside of these categories are serviced, becomes someone else's problem. Education and disability services again provide extra funded resources for children who meet certain diagnostic criteria. Child Protection is often left with the responsibility of picking up those children in care who "fall through the cracks", but it appears that they are ill equipped and underfunded to do so. The way in which this grappling for funding dollars within fairly structured service remits and outlines, to adequately service children who are experiencing difficulties plays itself out, can indeed be viewed as questionable as evidenced below.

'The nation is in the grip of an autism epidemic...and in Queensland the rate of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is officially one in 50 children' (*The Australian*, September 18-19, 2010, *Inquirer* 5). This is three times the rate reported in the rest of the world and the rest of Australia. The reason for this explosion in numbers, as explained in the article is the diagnosis-based funding models within the education system.

The inference being that ASD is over diagnosed in order to access school resources to help the children in need. This is not a new phenomenon within a system that only funds certain diagnosed illnesses and medications.

An American study in 2008 looked at psychotropic drug usage in ten to fourteen year old youths in foster care. By far, the most prescribed drugs were Dexamphetamines, Antidepressants and Antipsychotics, with an increased usage of eleven percent. Drugs were prescribed to combat symptoms rather than as a consequence of a concrete diagnosis (Zito, 2008). To Halasz, Australia is heading the same way as the U.S. in terms of DSM-IV symptom checklists and 'rapid' diagnosis in order to meet the criteria for treatment and assessment. A study of Dexamphetamine PBS prescription rates in Australia in financial year 1992-3, compared with 1999-2000, saw a massive increase, from 16559 prescriptions Australia wide to 243396. In Queensland alone numbers increased from 2555 in 1992-3 to 32290 in 2000 (Halasz, 2001).

In a national survey of mental health in children and young people in Australia in 2000, a reported eleven percent were diagnosed with ADHD. This has particular implications for children in care if one was to look at the symptom ontology of both ADHD and PTSD. Given that observable symptom ontology is dependent upon the viewer's perception of the degree, or level of maladaptive behaviour being inconsistent with developmental milestones, misdiagnosis for traumatised children is an ongoing issue. In a study by CREATE in 2005 in the Mackay/Whitsunday region thirteen percent of children in care who were interviewed identified with having a disability such as ADHD, Aspergers or an intellectual disability (CREATE Foundation, 2005).

The American Academy of Paediatrics supports the claim that there are no reliable medical tests used today in the diagnosis of ADHD.

Therefore, the current testing methods for ADHD are ineffective for diagnosis because there is not a medical test that can accurately identify the condition (Reiff, FAAP, Tippins, 2004). Of the seventeen diagnostic criteria listed for PTSD, eight symptoms can be correlated with ADHD, yet, according to the DSM, only six criteria are necessary for a diagnosis to be made.

These eight behavioral examples include; difficulty sleeping or concentrating, irritable outbursts, hypervigilance, depersonalization, lack of interests and participation, feelings of detachment, and an unawareness of surroundings (DSM-IV, 1994).

It is obvious that with almost half of the symptoms correlating with ADHD, past trauma used in identifying PTSD can easily be over looked. A child with PTSD may have various difficulties in school as a result of his or her symptoms. For instance, daydreaming may cause difficulty learning or dealing with new tasks/projects. Lack of sleep can cause lack of concentration and inattentiveness.

Murphy has further explored this correlation: *A child who shows signs of delusions or hallucinations may have problems being social with others. Attempting to avoid thoughts or feelings caused by the trauma, a child may appear unable to stay calm. Moreover, in recalling certain aspects of the trauma, a loss of confidence may suppress their commitment to learn and face new challenges. A child's lack of ability to express compassion may hinder social skills needed in the home or at school'* (Murphy, cited in Tueller 2004, pp. 32).

There has been little research on the effects of misdiagnosis and prolonged Dexamphetamine use on traumatised children in out of home care, although there is some evidence to suggest that Dexamphetamine use can exacerbate PTSD symptoms and more research needs to be conducted in this area.

The implications for children in out of home care as a consequence of multi-systemic failures, systemic gaps, misdiagnoses, along with over or incorrect medication application, should not be underestimated. As services argue over ultimate funding responsibility for certain aspects of children's lives, which remains reliant upon a positive diagnosis according to DSM or disability services criterion, the potential for adverse outcomes for these children increases.

As yet the long-term effects of incorrect medication due to misdiagnosis and/or undiagnosed and untreated PTSD remains unknown.

Local Audits and Research Projects

In the Mackay/Whitsunday region, several local file audits also took place in 2001 and in 2002. The first was conducted as part of the afore mentioned local partnership between James Cook University and the (then) Department of Families.

The paper highlighted the need to recognise Australian South Sea Islanders as a unique cultural group. According to the audit, Indigenous children comprise a quarter of the children in care in the region and 'Indigenous children are nearly thirteen times over-represented among children in care in the region' (McMahon et.al., 2003). At the time of the audit 'No children were identified as ASSI. The cultural identities of all the non-Aboriginal children were documented on file but the cultural identity of only three of the eighteen Aboriginal children was documented' (McMahon et.al., 2003). Neglect as stated previously, was the major reason for being taken into care. Alcohol and other drug abuse by the parents along with domestic and family violence were also often cited, alongside neglect, as reasons for removal.

At the time of this audit only two thirds of children had case plans on file and many were out of date. To McMahon,

'The pattern seems to be that when children come into care, a case plan is initiated in two-thirds of cases. The standard that this region appears to use is to substitute case planning meetings with family meetings and consultations but there do not appear to be case plans on any of the Indigenous files' (2002, p. 10).

The second audit was conducted as part of the Reconnect trial. The audit looked at placement stability and family connection for children aged ten years and under (53 in all). The audit reported the following outcomes:

- 30% of children in care (in this age range) in Mackay are from Indigenous or Indigenous/non-Indigenous decent;
- 88% of non-Indigenous children are placed with carers outside the extended family;
- A number of children who were known to identify as Indigenous were identified as non-Indigenous on the file;

- The majority of children had been in care for three or more years, 42% had been in care over four years;
- 20% of children under ten years are placed with all of their siblings;
- 56% live with some of their siblings;
- 9% of children had no contact with other siblings in care and, for the majority of children, sibling contact was not case planned and occurred spasmodically or on parental contact visits. In the case of siblings who were not in care, contact was not tracked in the files, nor reflected in case plans or other meeting documents;
- 26 children in the study had weekly or fortnightly supervised contact with their mother, 17 children had similar contact with their father;
- Contact with extended family was spasmodic and unplanned (Moss, 2003).

There were also a number of foster care research projects that took place as part of the research partnership.

One study by Thorpe and Westerhuis (2006) looks at foster carers' attitudes to foster children's families. The research looked at inclusive foster care practices. The *Indigenous Child Placement Principal*, the *Child Protection Act 1999* and the subsequent *Statement of Commitment between the Department of Families and Foster Carers of Queensland* all, 'assert key principles of reunification wherever possible, continuing contact regardless of the probability of reunification, and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within their own communities' (2005).

The research by Thorpe and Westerhuis, clearly aligns children's identity with connection to family and community, with some interesting results. In terms of empathy with natural parents, proportionally more empathic responses were received from Indigenous carers (32%) than non-Indigenous carers (15%).

According to Thorpe and Westerhuis, empathy for natural parents was expressed more frequently by *Limited*²⁴ carers compared with *Relative* carers.

24 Limited carers are those carers who continue to provide foster care for a particular child or children. Generally these children have lived with these same carers for some time and the placement remains limited in that no new children can be placed with them. Limited carers are not relatives of the child.

This difference may be indicative of the greater stress from complex family relationships²⁵ which not infrequently is part of the experience of foster care for relatives (2006). This was evidenced in this research in the narratives of Tom, Tony and Abbey, the only three children in this research who lived with relative or kinship carers.

Also of interest was the legacy of the *Stolen Generation* and the environment of mistrust it has left in its wake, as evidenced by these two quotes;

“Not too many people who have to deal with the Department from the other side of the tracks (when they’ve got problems with their children)...trust the Department. There’s an insecurity situation with that.” (Indigenous General Carer, 219)

“I felt really bad when we had to meet with the twin’s parents when we were at the hospital. We were just upset seeing the mother hand the babies over to us, like that was just not on..... that was like I was stealing their babies and that made me cry and (my partner) cry, and he gave the lady a cuddle. That was stressful, yeah.” (Indigenous General Carer, 228)

The research found that; ‘two-thirds of the foster carers interviewed had, at best, predominately mixed views about a foster child’s own family. Amongst these, one-third held predominately negative views, and their child centredness focussed on a child’s stability needs to the exclusion of valuing identity needs’ (Thorpe, 2005). These attitudes, it is argued can have direct implications for access visits. Contact visits with parents can be highly emotive. Supervised visits often take place in an office environment with family interactions being watched by Departmental or AICCA staff.

Children have to also contend with saying goodbye again and/or may have been forced to attend the visit when they did not feel ready to do so.

Children can often display regressive and/or aggressive behaviours after contact visits, as perhaps a consequence of untreated PTSD. Carers may read these behaviours as signalling, sadly not necessarily accurately, that contact needs to be stopped in order to arrest these behaviours as this quote highlights;

25 The Aboriginal concept of ‘shame’ may also be an important consideration when looking at attitudes to natural parents. ‘Shame’ can result in avoidance behaviours among relatives and right skin community members.

“I’d like to see the contact didn’t continue, being that neither of ‘em will ever be accepted as candidates to take her back again. So I think it’s just a torment.” (non-Indigenous Relative carer, 022)

This kind of attitude on behalf of the carer, can also lead to the sabotaging of access visits so that they do not occur. In cases where the carer is not connected to the child’s community, the child can more easily themselves become disconnected, which can worsen if contact visits with extended family do not occur. Indeed, such behaviours have also been used as evidence by carers in Children’s Commission and court proceedings to suggest continued contact with family is not in “the best interest of the child.” Like my own research, this research also exposed the way in which Attachment Theory plays itself out in practice. In these instances it is the foster carers who receive Departmental scorn for keeping in touch with a foster child after reunification has occurred.

“We have still been involved with the parents and the Department has frowned on it. It was on-going and continued whether the child was with us, with another carer or back with the parent because that’s the type of relationship we’d actually struck.” (non-Indigenous general carer)

“I have still got relationships with children I have had in my care, and their families....they acknowledge that we’re a big part of their children’s lives and we are a big part of their life as well.” (non-Indigenous General carer)

It is clear from the majority of recent research about trauma treatment and resilience, that being able to form relationships with nurturing adults who are consistent and predictable, can play a huge role in trauma recovery (Perry, 2006, p. 39). There is however much anecdotal evidence in the case of this regional office as further highlighted in Thorpe and Westerhuis’ research, to suggest that such bonding is viewed by Department workers, as a ‘lack of boundaries’ on the part of the Carer (2006).

Another research project in 2002-2004 by McMahon et al., (2003), which was also part of the ARC grant, looked at how we define well-being for Indigenous children in care. Three focus groups were conducted to critically explore current well-being indicators and to make suggestions as to what needs to be included.

Of note is that it was to the spirit that participants continually referred when discussing well-being, for example;

..The key...the key for all of us, I think is the spiritual side of our black kids and that of all their brothers and sisters that are being...everything- you name it- thats happening to them... there's no space for the spiritual. ...Spirit is a healing thing.” (M1) and,

“When a child goes through that (abuse) their spirit gets broken...their spirit gets broken and there is no one to support them...and a lot of young people commit suicide because their spirit is broken.” (F2)

and, *“...Murri way- the responsibility of that healing process of country...and talk to people within that circle who own that country and have the right to speak for it...self belief...and family...all those things have been bastardised by the system...it's not just individual...because intergenerational trauma causes spiritual death and that just goes on to suicide...and I'm talking about black and white kids.” (M)*

For this group, identity was linked with family for example,

“Yeah about that gap...we had a young lady, and she didn't...well people were saying, ‘oh your Torres Strait...and she wasn't...see? And we sort of got the name of her family and traced it back for her...and now she knows where she is from...and who her people is and her gap's filled. You know, that circle is finalised. She can go on now with her life because she knows who she is, where she come from, and that gap has been filled...She has a sense of belonging.” (F)

“They know their identity, they know where they come from...and they know who's responsible for them...so they are placed firmly within that circle.” (M)

The narratives above correlate with many of the narratives told as part of the *Bringing Them Home Report* explaining how their extended family worked.

‘...you have your freedom and especially the happiness that comes from being with your family, grandparents, mothers, and your extra grandparents and your extra mothers, because they are within your family structure. Whoever your mother's cousin is, she's your mother as well, and the same as whoever your grandmother's cousin or sisters are, they're your grandparents too’ (in Mellor, 2002, p. 37).

On extended family contact the McMahon et al., (2007) research found that,

“I think that children must maintain that extended (family) link because thats what culture is based on, isn’t it?” (R1) and

“I think that children, its a total must that they have to maintain those links, contacts with extended family.” (R1)

Respondents were also able to articulate systemic issues as to why this contact doesn’t occur,

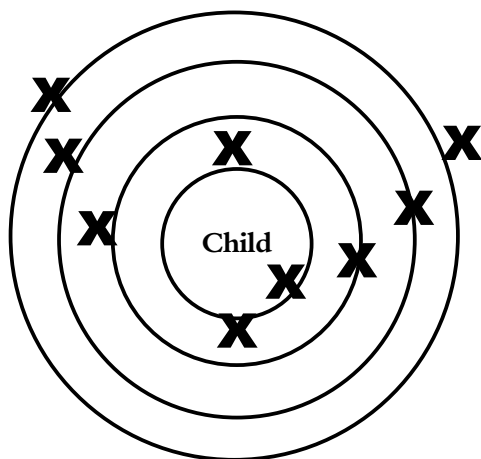
“Yes they (CSO) are driven by their ...own background, their own opinions and value system.” (R1)

“White men only go to first and second cousins. Us here at the table, we can go right back to who our fifth and fourth cousins are. Team Leaders and FSO’s (CSO)...oh they have only got first and second cousins but it’s not like that. It’s this big extended family.” (R6)

One participant also highlighted how this family support system works:

“Like you sort of have, I guess the mark is grandparents in the middle. They were the top god and held counsel and so the families had to, like if anything went wrong they came back to there and sought guidance and what have you. And children like.., they might of said, well you’re not really coping really well, these children need to go over here for this particular reason and what have you, or so our whole system is sort of...,I mean that’s broken down.” (R1)

As part of action research in my own work with a mobile outreach service in the Northern Territory, the service devised the diagram below as a reworking of Systems Theory to better match our work with remote Aboriginal families.



'This systems approach sees the child at the centre of circles of carers; with each circle being made up of the appropriate family and cultural members pertinent to the needs of the child. Over time, as a child moves from birth to adulthood, the roles of each level of circle changes, as the needs of a child changes. Thus, early in a child's life the most active circle of carers might be immediate female relatives: mothers, grandmothers and aunts. As a child ages, particularly if they are a boy, the role of male carers may become dominant. Similarly, the people in the circles of care have different responsibilities for a child's upbringing; for example, someone in the kinship structure might have responsibility for naming or disciplining a child, but not have day-to-day care of him or her' (McCallum, 2010, p. 21).

There is no doubt that this presents the ideal, however in reality there are many fractures to the circles due to the historical legacy of Indigenous Australians.

The model seems to also fit well with more traditional and perhaps less fractured communities, where access to strong Elders and strong extended family is more readily available.²⁶ The model may have further use in assessing and providing connection to family and community for children in the child protection system.

It also fits well with the *Family Group Conferencing* model ²⁷ at the early intervention stage which will be further explored in Chapter Nine.

26 This model was being used in order to provide voluntary counselling services to remote Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. In order to access the child, the service provider must first ascertain who in the family they need to speak with, whilst also conferring with the Elders and Traditional Owners in order to attain agreed access to the community and most importantly community support of the service. In order to provide a holistic service, the service provider needs to work with and include these important people in the circles around the child.

27 'The decision-making models have grown out of the New Zealand experience based on Maori and Pacific Islander understandings of family and family responsibility. They are based on principles of collective responsibility, mutual obligations and shared interest' in regards to a child's wellbeing.' (NT Government, 2010, p. 35).

Young People and Participation

In 2005, in collaboration with CREATE foundation, (the peak body for children and young people in care), the Mackay/Whitsunday Region of the Department of Families hired local young consultants to conduct consultations with children and young people in out of home care. Feedback from forty respondents about the quality of care was attained. All up, the forty participants had a total of six hundred and twenty-four years in the care system and one hundred and sixty-one different placements. The survey found that children and young people were able to cite who they thought was most important to them in terms of regular contact. The findings articulate that *‘...most children and young people need to be connected to their friends, then their siblings, and mother’*. Dads, grandparents, step-dads, cousins, aunties, uncles, foster sisters and carers were also mentioned. *‘For children and young people from an Indigenous backgrounds, the most frequent people mentioned were their mum, their siblings and then their friends. They were also most likely to nominate members of the extended family’* (CREATE Foundation, 2005, pp. 27-28). As will be seen, this same hierarchy of attachment was also reflected in the outcomes of this thesis.

As part of the regional push in Mackay/Whitsunday to encourage inclusive practice and child participation, SPLAT was created to provide a mechanism by which children in care could inform different levels of Departmental practice on a regional level. It also provided a platform for another part of the ARC research grant which, this time involved the participation of children and young people in care in all areas of the research, from design to presentation of the findings at conference proceedings. The young people in care were asked what staying connected to family means to them. Below are some of the responses:

“To stay connected with my family means a lot to me because my family still plays a big part in my life. I have always seen them since I’ve been in care.” (Kenny – 15)

“I don’t know. I’m not connected with my family.” (Darl – 17)

“In my case, there was no chance of reunification and I didn’t want to know my family but my foster carer kept in touch with them to keep up to date with what was going on. I look back now and see the time I missed out on with my siblings but because my carer kept in contact with them I know who I am and where I am from.” (Cheal – 21) (Daley, Moss & Raey, 2005)

The respondents were questioned on their knowledge and levels of participation regarding case plans. Here are some of the responses;

“What do you mean a case plan? I haven’t been involved with my case plans and don’t really want to be involved because I don’t care, because I don’t listen to what they say anyway.” (Darl-17)

and, *“I haven’t been involved in case plans and don’t get told much about my life. I get told what to do pretty much.”* (Kenny-15) (Daley, Moss & Raey, 2005)

What is of interest is that these statements were made at a time when young people were the most visible, in that SPLAT members were working from within the area office. With the advent of *A Blueprint* and the new Departmental restructure all of these initiatives were shelved.

Within this chapter I have explored the complexities inherent in the child protection system in Queensland, along with the effects of political decision making, systemic funding mechanisms and work force issues which inform practice and service provision for children in out of home care. By exploring the plethora of research findings to take place within the time-frame of this research, a richer perspective than would otherwise have been possible, is able to inform my own research.

The following chapter *Methods and Processes* explores the methodology and particular processes followed in this research. Indeed, given the age and vulnerability of the children in the study, adherence to certain requirements and processes was ethically paramount. The chapter also explores the aims and rationale of the research along with the special child appropriate tools that were devised in order to ensure informed consent and enhance understanding for the children. The process used to interview the participants and conduct the art group is also detailed.

Chapter Four

Research Design, Methods and Processes

The central premise of this research was to hear what children and young people had to say about identity. The previous two chapters explored the historical context of the concept identity within a number of disciplines, along with some of the theoretical models surrounding the concept of childhood within a child protection context. They also explored the specific context of this research and discussed some of the localised research findings that helped inform this research. The research presented in this thesis surveys the formation of identity for children and young people in out of home care, using narrative art therapy, with a particular emphasis on multi-cultural and Indigenous children and young people. The research provides insight into the images created by children and young people and explores identity, culture and sense of self from their own perspective. This chapter will look at the research aims and design, methodology used, ethical considerations and data analysis.

Research Aims

The aim of this research, was to ascertain how children and young people view and negotiate identity and in doing so, explore identity from Aboriginal, Torres Strait, Australian South Sea Islander and interracial perspectives.

It also aims to explore how children negotiate their cultural identity and how this is managed in the child protection system. The child protection practitioner may not consider or practice from a culturally appropriate framework. Ultimately this research explores how young people in care from different cultural backgrounds negotiate essentialist and political notions of cultural identity.

Notions of identity for individual children within the care system in the Mackay/Whitsunday region were analysed by exploring not only the views of the children themselves, but also how the child protection system may impact upon this for individual children. In terms of the participants, this research includes both children in, and not in out of home care as a means of collecting comparative data.

It was also important to ascertain what was occurring in practice for children in care. The research accomplishes this by analysing relevant systemic and attitudinal factors such as: how workers view identity and how the theories they utilise in this work may effect practice; how the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* is enacted in practice and if there are systemic attitudinal deficits within the child protection system in Queensland that may inhibit identity work with children in care. Ultimately, the research aimed to identify how child protection workers could incorporate these learnings into practice.

Rationale

The rationale for this research was to inform and develop a more culturally appropriate and relevant child protection practice in working with children and identity.

Relevance of the Research

As evidenced in the previous chapter, unlike the theory around identity, which has changed considerably over the years, in practice, it appears that child protection workers continue to work mainly from a Developmental, Essentialist and Attachment Theory framework. The considerable body of work that critiques the fundamental assumptions inherent in developmental and attachment-based theories has not translated into changes in child protection practice guidelines and frameworks, where these assumptions remain embedded. The issues raised by Indigenous and post-modernist research (Crawford, Dudgeon, & Briskman, 2007; Parekh, 2008; Cohen, 1994; Nidorf, 1985; Ito, 1985) remain ignored. Contrary to essentialist notions of identity, research argues that identity is something continuously negotiated by the individual (Meredith, 1998; Katz, 1996; Luke, 1994).

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* is considered central to placement decision making in Queensland, this research seeks to explore the implementation of the *Child Placement Principle* along with the impediments, if any, to adherence. Statistical data collection and analysis are only as good as the data entry that occurs at the individual office level, therefore this research will also explore what occurs in practice when children initially enter the child protection system and information is gathered outlining a child's culture and next of kin. What are the potential impediments to robust data collection and what are the assumptions made on individual practice and systemic levels that challenge practical adherence to the *Child Placement Principle*? The qualitative nature of this research will provide insight into child protection worker perceptions in terms of current practice.

As discussed extensively elsewhere in this research, Indigenous children are significantly over-represented in the out of home care system across Australia.

At the time of this research they were seven times more likely to be in out of home care and six times more likely to be on care and protection orders (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006).

To date, little research has occurred around the meaning of identity for different Indigenous groups and individuals within the Australian child protection context. In the Mackay/Whitsunday region many children in care are from a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural backgrounds. In the main, a research and practice guideline about identity formation, although viewed as central to the wellbeing of children, has omitted the voices of children and young people. This research seeks to explore how children and young people in care themselves view identity.

This research involved a high percentage of interracial children in the study cohort. Of the twenty children in this research sample, only two were Anglo or Anglo/European. Of the remaining eighteen, eleven were Anglo/Aboriginal or Anglo/Indigenous/South East Asian, hence this thesis may provide further insight into identity for multicultural children within the context of the Queensland child protection system. A full analysis of the respondents' cultural specificity is found in Table 3 and in Chapter Five.

Given the high number of multicultural children who participated in the research, it was also important to address the notion of multicultural heritage and how children and young people negotiate this. The research had a particular emphasis on Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander children.

The qualitative nature of the research provides an investigation into the wellbeing and identity of a small number of children, in one small town of Queensland Australia, at a particular point in time. However, the practice and systemic issues that become highlighted by the research may have a wider applicability and provide some understanding in this field.

Research Design

My interest in power, knowledge and truth led to the adaptation of a flexible qualitative approach, which would enable the subjective truths of the participants in the research to be fully expressed and understood. In keeping with this underpinning is the declaration of the specificity of all research participants.

The research design's fundamental premise was to allow for enough flexibility in order to ensure a truly child focused process, hence the wishes of the individual children involved in terms of process could be incorporated. This entailed giving participants a choice as to whether they would like to be involved in an art group, an art group and an interview or just an interview. It was also a choice as to whether they would create any artwork/s. Given the qualitative nature of the research, this again was not viewed as an issue that would effect research findings. It was of no surprise to the researcher that the children who elected to participate in the group were those children aged between seven and eleven and a number of these children also knew each other prior to the group. Four of the participants were cousins which, given the extensive nature of Indigenous families, was not surprising. Given the one-off nature of the art group, it is likely that this familiarity amongst this subset of children helped produce a level of group cohesion amongst those children who were engaged in the group process.

The researcher initially met three of the young people in care aged between fifteen and seventeen as a group, which took place in a consulting service where they attended to attain living skills as they transitioned from care. The research was explained to them and individuals were offered an art group and/or individual interviews should they elect to participate. All three young people chose to participate in the research, with one choosing to only complete the Survey Tool (*Appendix G*). All three declined participation in an art group with two agreeing to be interviewed.

In the case of the four siblings who were part of the study, they were offered the same choices but they all elected to be interviewed individually and produce their artwork separately.

As highlighted by Mason (2000), much of the research that professes to be child focused does not provide a space to really hear what children think, due to the structured nature of the methodology used. A recent study in the United Kingdom by Winter (2010), addressed this issue in terms of listening to young children in care but to date no such research has taken place specifically around identity and cultural identification for younger children in foster care. There have been numerous studies and surveys in the past decade that have incorporated child-focused methodologies (Butler, Robinson & Scanlan (2005); Percy-Smith & Thomas (2010)). Organisations, such as CREATE, make a substantial contribution in this area and the Internet can provide a platform for distribution that was unavailable a decade ago.

This research sought to ensure a child focused approach by providing enough flexibility to allow for engagement at whatever level was comfortable for the individual participant. This, I felt was important in terms of ensuring a safe process particularly for some of the more vulnerable children in care who were part of the research. Likewise the art materials were made available at the art group and at the individual interview, and the children and young people were invited to use the materials if they wished. At no point were participants directed to make an artwork in order to fulfill research requirements. In this way, a respectful process was further assured. Indeed these individual choices made as part of the process, helped inform the analysis.

Conducting research in a small town in which you work, also suggests an additional dynamic, in that it could potentially both help and/or hinder the research. That several of the children were known to me as discussed further in the following chapter, meant that, in these cases, as a researcher I had to continually reflect on whether this would have a negative impact upon the participant or the research outcomes. It was important to gain as much understanding as possible about the participants, which was achieved by accessing data from a number of sources. This would help provide a holistic picture of the complexities involved, which in turn would contextualise the interviews and the art making.

An informal assumption made at the onset of this research was that identity, or knowing who you are and where you belong, is an important aspect of a child's wellbeing. Certainly within child protection practice literature and practice manuals as discussed earlier, identity formation is highlighted as such. This research seeks to identify what this means in practice.

The Art Group

In my initial meeting with the potential participants, the research was explained to them in order to gain informed consent. The following outlines the process of identifying research participants for the art group and subsequent interviews.

A consultation process with Departmental workers, AICCA workers, parents, carers and children was conducted in order to identify suitable participants.

Initially Departmental workers were approached regarding the research and were asked for recommendations regarding whom they identified as appropriate participants. AICCA workers were also approached and it was these workers who made recommendations for Indigenous participants that were forwarded to the case manager. Initially, there was a level of concern in terms of the possible 'gate-keeping' role of case managers in participant selection however, this possibility was somewhat counteracted by recommendations initially made by AICCA and in some cases the carers.

Not in care participants were recruited either by parents who knew of, and were interested in the research, or by young people known to the researcher requesting to participate. The researcher met with all participants prior to the workshop to make sure they understood the purpose of the workshop, what the workshop would entail and their rights as participants. They were offered the opportunity to participate in an individual and/or group session. It was highlighted throughout all stages of the research that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage. These concepts were addressed in age appropriate ways.

With the consent of the James Cook University Ethics committee, the research included children as young as four years of age. This inclusion was deemed important in terms of providing an appropriate forum to hear the voices of what is probably one of the most disempowered groups. Having worked for many years with children four years and older, I utilised these same techniques to communicate adult concepts in a child appropriate manner. I also acknowledged that each child was an individual whose cognitive ability was not always dictated by age, I was thus also guided by the individual's language and cognitive ability.

When I initially met with the younger children, I had art materials with me, in that providing such materials can both enhance communication and decrease any anxiety the child may feel as a consequence of talking with an adult who may not be known to them. As a qualified Art Therapist the methods used within art therapy group work could be easily adapted to achieve research outcomes. I have used such methods within the child protection system when interviewing children for many years.

Seven children aged between seven to twelve years old opted to participate in a group. This is an ideal group size and age demographic, hence only one group was held. An appropriate time and venue was arranged with participants and carers. It was vital that the venue be child friendly.²⁸

²⁸ A child friendly space, is a space that provides a child with a safe haven to play and experiment which WorldVision document as being essential to recovery (World Vision, 2011).

Below is a vignette example of how a participant in the younger age was approached to help them to understand the concept of confidentiality. Please note that this piece of the conversation would take place within the context of the initial meeting when I was explaining the process. Pictorial representations (*Appendix A*) to be used during the group were utilised for the younger children, which also acted as a pictorial prompt during the group.

“I’m going to ask six or seven other children about your age to join in the group to make some art together. Do you think you will be OK to do some artwork and meet some other kids?”

Sometimes when we do artwork some yukky stuff or things you don’t feel Ok to share with people you don’t know very well might come up. You or the other kids in the group don’t have to share anything you don’t feel Ok about sharing.

Do you know what a rule is? What kind of rules do you have at home or school?

To make sure everyone feels safe and OK we are going to have a group rule that what we talk about and do in the group doesn’t get talked about when we leave. We will talk about this again when we all meet together before the group starts.

If something does come up for you and makes you feel yuk, you and I might need to talk about what we might need to do for you to feel safe again.”

Leibman (1992) outlines aspects of group work, which are enhanced by using art as a group activity:

- Everyone can join in at the same time, at his or her own level. The process of the activity is important, and a scribble can be as much of a contribution as a finished painting;
- Art can be another important avenue of communication and expression, especially when words fail;
- Art facilitates creativity;
- Art products are tangible and can be examined at a later time.

Art therapy groups can provide a combination of individual and group experiences (Leibman, 1992, p. 159). Such groups can also be empowering as non-verbal activities can act as an equaliser.

It was explained in the initial meeting, on the information sheets provided and at the beginning of the art group, that it was preferred that the artworks get left with the researcher in order to dry properly, which would allow time to photograph the works, but that the works will be returned to them either when I met with them next, sent in the mail to them on request or, alternatively if they really wanted to, they could take it with them after the group. This was also explained to the young people before the individual interviews.

As discussed, the group rules were reinforced with the children from when I met with them individually. These rules were discussed and written up on a white board (*Appendix K*), and for the youngest age group, pictorial representations were used (*Appendix A*) so that the group rules could be viewed throughout the workshop. These rules were arrived at with the group in order to ensure the safety, respect and confidentiality of all participants. The rules also outlined group parameters such as time given for the art making and group discussion as well as 'house-keeping' issues. The issue of disclosure was also discussed in an age appropriate format to further ensure safety. Age appropriate activities and art and play supplies were provided along with refreshments. The session was approximately one and half-hours in duration.

The size of the group, in this case a total of seven participants, was important to ensure the following factors:

- Members could maintain visual and verbal contact with all other members;
- Group cohesiveness could be achieved;
- There was an opportunity for each person to have an adequate share of time in discussion;
- There were enough people to encourage interaction and a free flow of ideas (Douglas, 1967, pp. 85-6).

Structured art therapy groups have a membership of between six and twelve

participants and have a similar format, which involves the introduction, activity, and discussion. The introduction involves a welcome to the group, introduction of members, purpose of the group, group rules including confidentiality and often it includes a 'warm up exercise'. This type of exercise is utilised as a way for participants to interact and be introduced on their own terms and often utilises a play activity of some sort. The art making phase takes up usually over half the available time. The discussion takes the rest of the time, the format can be quite fluid (Dalley, 1984). The art making group followed this format including an introduction, an activity, and discussion as discussed below.

Introduction

The introduction included a welcome, introduction, an explanation of the group purpose and themes and group rules. Like all other stages it was reiterated that they were free not to participate if they chose. Members were invited to participate in a short group activity as a 'getting to know you' or 'ice-breaker' exercise.

The ball game *A ball is thrown from one person to another, the catcher calls out the name of the thrower.*

This kind of activity allowed for playful interaction.

This activity was followed by an introduction to the main activity.

Activity

As in the initial interviews, the theme "Who am I?" was rediscussed in the group environment and it was explained to the children that thirty to forty-five minutes were available for the participants to make the artwork/s.

Once the art making process began, the researcher circulated within the group to help participants with art materials and any questions if needed.

Group Discussion

Once the art making was complete the group gathered together and individuals were

invited to share their work with the larger group. It was outlined during group rules that participants were not obliged to share with the group if they did not wish to.

Examples of Questions

Mary would you like to tell the others about your picture?

Which are your favourite bits?

What will you name your picture?

Often the sharing of the artwork in this way can provide the language and context for future questioning. 'In a sense, the picture or sculpture belongs equally to both conscious and unconscious worlds and presents a kind of dialogue between the two' (Dalley, 1984, p. 85). Gardner contends that as a child develops they learn to make sense of the world via iconic, linguistic, musical, logical and mathematical means, which allows the individual to make sense of the 'self'. In the absence of one (or more) of these modes of mental activity the others will overcompensate (Gardner, 1985).

Of the seven group participants two participants elected not to be interviewed.

Individual Interviews

All of the participants were contacted after the initial meeting and a suitable time and venue (as decided by the child and, if appropriate, the carer) was arranged. Of the original twenty participants, as discussed earlier, three elected not to participate in an individual interview. These three children were all in out of home care. A total of seventeen individual interviews were conducted. The interviews were audio taped and later transcribed.

Of the seven participants involved in the art group, five elected to participate in an individual interview and these participants were invited to share his or her group artwork individually with the researcher in order to create a safe space for appropriate questioning around the narrative. Thirteen participants elected to only be interviewed and not participate in a group.

Narrative questioning about the artwork/s took place to elicit responses in regards to:

- The narrative behind the artwork and it's making;
- The relationship between the different elements in the work;
- Whether their response to the artwork had changed since making the artwork;
- They were also asked at this stage what they wish to do with the artwork.

The Interview

As discussed earlier, art materials were also made available at the individual interviews. Thirteen participants chose to include making an artwork/s as part of their interview process.

Closed questions were asked in order to contextualise the artwork and interviews. Data collection included; age, gender, length of time in care, extended family contact arrangements, and school experience. Open ended questions were asked in order to ascertain:

- What their thoughts about identity were;
- If they feel that their ideas about their identity have changed from when they were younger;
- Who and/or what is important to them;
- Do they have ideas about what Departmental workers/carers can do to better the current system?

These questions were framed in a child appropriate way dependent upon their age and cognitive ability. For example, more mature participants were asked by the researcher;

“What/or who is important to you?”

For less mature children the following scenario was asked:

“Say you had to go away on an Island to live but you could choose to take whoever or whatever was important to you....Who and what would you take?”

It is interesting to note that given a lack of response by some older male participants to the initial question, framing the question in this second way enabled a response to be provided. The conversational format of the interviews allowed for greater flexibility in being able to discuss subjects as they arose.

Feeling cards were also devised (*Appendix L*) in order to ascertain how often a respondent might feel anger, sadness or scared. It also provided a device to ask if they like school and what is important or special to them.

As discussed above, a survey tool (*Appendix G*) was devised for the older participants. This tool had a rating scale with a variety of responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Bullen, 2004). Prior to utilisation in the research, the tool was assessed by SPLAT members which, although not a professionally validated tool, its use is consistent with qualitative research methodology whereby credibility and authenticity is determined by young people in care.

Page one of the survey focussed on culture and cultural identity. The rest of the survey focussed on health, self-image, self-esteem and coping habits. The tool was utilised as a fun way to start the interview and allowed for other information to be gathered that could later inform analysis of the interview material.

Out of Scope

The focus of this research is on the children's views and how the child protection system works with identity issues, hence carers and parents were not part of the study sample. As part of the ARC funded partnership, as discussed in the introduction and expanded upon in Chapter Three, research with carers on a range of topics had just been completed and I was able to incorporate the research findings into my own research. It was not within the scope of this research to interview parents. Ten of the children in care in the research had no contact with their father and three had little to no contact with their mother, the reasons for lack of contact are explored further in Chapter Five. Given the small study sample, it is likely that this would have an impact on data outcomes and future research needs to be conducted in this regard.

Use of Consultants

The afore mentioned research partnership between James Cook University and the Department of Communities in Mackay Queensland was instrumental in helping to formulate a child friendly methodology. Working in child protection within the same community one is researching, proved fortuitous in that I had access to key individuals who could help inform both the process and methodology. One such example is having access to SPLAT members. The CREATE foundation and Young Consultants within the Mackay/Whitsunday region, SPLAT, were utilised on a consultative basis. In order to help ensure a child friendly process, the opinions of these young people in care were considered at every step of the research. Professor Rosamund Thorpe provided supervision for this section of the methodology. Process tools developed for the research were adjusted according to advice given by SPLAT members prior to submission for ethics approval. The partnership itself also ensured regular access to a range of academics and senior Departmental staff members.

Ethics and Children

In this section I will review the ethical considerations and approval processes along with the special tools that were devised in order to help ensure an ethical process. Due to the age of research participants, special ethics requirements were needed, which included developing a framework to ensure the wellbeing, informed consent and confidentiality of all participants. Several key guides to research ethics were utilised in order to obtain ethics approval from James Cook University. Pictorial representations of the process were produced to help ensure informed consent from younger participants, along with child and young person friendly consent and information forms. My Human Ethics Approval Number is H1833.

The Use of Art

Many theorists and researchers have acknowledged the use of art and play when endeavoring to communicate with children. Art and play are essential tools for the Art Therapist to both communicate with children and young people as well as provide a means by which their voices can be heard (Case & Dalley, 1992).

In Narrative Art Therapy, the client is encouraged to make their own interpretation. White and Epsom (1989) argue that, in order for us to make sense of our lives they must be 'storied', and new experiences are perceived according to the pre-existing story. The particular qualities of image making simultaneously allows for multiple meanings, time-frames and interrelationships for some experiences, '...(We) simply do not understand what we are experiencing, either because the experiences aren't storyable, or because we lack the performative and narrative resources, or because vocabulary is lacking' (Bruner cited in White, & Epsom, 1989, p. 20). This may be particularly the case, with children who have experienced trauma, hence the image can be viewed as an extension of, as well as a vehicle for, the verbal narrative (Chapman, et al., 2001, Hagood, 2000, Herman, 1992). The use of such techniques within a research framework aids the communication process without the aim of a therapeutic outcome, although the process may have some therapeutic benefit.

Ethical Considerations

Given the nature of the research, a number of ethical considerations needed to be acknowledged. All care was taken to ensure the wellbeing of all participants. The rights, anonymity, safety and confidentiality as outlined in the Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association (ANZATA) ethics document as well as Duty of Care, intrinsic to the community welfare sector, were vigorously adhered to. There were several components to this research in which differing ethical considerations were intrinsic. For each component I accessed specialised supervision.

When devising research questions and methodologies with the Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Islander communities, a consultation process with appropriate community members took place. The respective Indigenous community members continued to be informed of and consulted throughout the research, as were the participants. Interviewees were given information about the research as well as their rights in the preliminary stages. A consent form submitted as part of the ethics proposal (*Appendix E and F*), outlined these rights and was given to each participant for them to sign. Professor Rosamund Thorpe supervised this section of the research.

The inclusion of the views of children and young people was intrinsic to research outcomes. The research aimed to gather the views of children and young people of differing age groups. Informed consent from the parent/carer, the Department (if the child was in care) and the child or young person was obtained. The researcher met with possible participants, and the project was explained to them. Their rights were also explained. This initial meeting also aided in the rapport building process.

The use of Art Therapy techniques to facilitate this process was incorporated into the research design. Art provided the vehicle by which children and young people were able to explore their own narratives more fully. My extensive experience as a qualified and registered Art Therapist provided a safe environment for this to occur. To become qualified as an Art Therapist I completed a Masters degree in Arts Therapy, which included over 650 hours of supervised practice. Since completion I have worked in private practice in Sydney for some seven years, as well as working within the community sector as an Art and Play Therapist in areas such as Child Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence and Mental Health. I have since used these skills when working with children in the Child Protection sector and more recently managed a therapeutic service for Aboriginal children on remote communities. Group work has also been intrinsic to my role and I have extensive experience working with different client groups within a group setting. This combined, amounts to over seventeen years of experience working with children and families.

In line with the ANZATA ethics, Mr. Michael Bishop, who is a qualified Occupational Therapist with many years of clinical experience using Art Therapy, provided supervision for this component. He was also Regional Director of the Mackay/Whitsunday Department of Families and a Co-chief Investigator of the ARC Linkage Research Project between James Cook University and the Department of Families Mackay/Whitsunday. I was also able to utilise fellow ANZATA professionals on a consultative basis, for example, Dr. Sheridan Linnell was consulted whilst writing Chapter Six, 'The Artwork Explored' along with visual research methodologies. Dr. Linnell heads the Arts Therapy Masters course at the University of Western Sydney.

In order to provide an Aboriginal perspective to the exploration of the images made by the children in the research, Mr. Anthony Duwun Lee, an Aboriginal Artist and Traditional Healer was consulted. Mr. Lee also works as an Aboriginal Therapeutic Resource Worker on remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Ensuring the Welfare of Participants

The primary “target” group for this research was children and young people in the care of the Department of Communities. This placed the research in Category 5, as outlined in the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Procedure Guidelines. It is essential that the research provided for the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing and safety of the young people involved. In developing a framework to ensure the welfare and confidentiality of all participants I drew upon the *NHMRC Human Research Ethics Handbook* (Issued February 2002). In addition I have also drawn upon Burnside’s Research Code of Ethics (May 2000) which has a particular focus on ethical requirements of research with children and young people; the *James Cook University Manual: Standard Practices for Research and Teaching Human Subjects* (2000); and *Standards of Professional Practice and Code of Ethics of the Australian and New Zealand Art Therapy Association Incorporated*.

Tools to Obtain Informed Consent and Aid the Interview Process

As highlighted above, pictorial tools and child and young people friendly forms and information sheets were developed as outlined below. All of these tools were informed via consultation with SPLAT members.

Appendix A: Was created to pictorially explain the group art-making process to younger participants.

Carers and parents were sent via mail the letter (*Appendix B*), the Information Sheet (*Appendix C*) and Consent Form (*Appendix E*). This was followed up by a phone call from the researcher to arrange a meeting.

Appendix C: An information sheet was devised in order to ensure carer/parent understanding and informed consent. Contact details were also provided in order to provide an accessible avenue for questions to be answered.

Appendix D: Information sheets for older and younger children.

Appendix E and F: Two types of consent forms were devised, one for older children, the other for younger children. *Appendix E* includes a space for carer/parent consent.

Appendix H: Informed Consent form for Departmental and AICCA staff members and Elders interviewed.

Risk with this type of research can be considered minimal and in fact the process can be considered beneficial to the participants in that creating and sharing the artwork can be an empowering experience. In line with Art Therapy best practice, the creator will own the artwork and will therefore be at liberty to take the work from the research site (see methodology). It was, however outlined in the initial meeting that, with the artist's consent, photographs will be taken of the artwork for research purposes.

During the initial meeting with the child or young person, it was explained that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could change their mind at any time during the research. As outlined above, what participation entailed and issues such as confidentiality were discussed and an Informed Consent Form was left with the participant, thus giving them time to decide if they wish to participate prior to the assigned research date. Of those children approached, only two chose not to participate at this stage. Given the child focused underpinning of this research, the children were not pressed to give a reason.

Participant Safety and Disclosure

Should a distressing incident have occurred during the research contact, the participant would have been supported at the time by the research facilitator (who is an experienced therapist as detailed above). Should the need have arisen, the participant had the choice of either an internal referral for counselling via the Department of Child Safety or externally through Queensland Health, at no cost to the participant. This information was provided to participants prior to the commencement of the research. However, there was no such occurrence during the interviews or the art group.

Given the nature of the artwork, disclosure is not uncommon. If this happened as part of a group process, steps would have been taken to ensure the child or young person's safety and confidentiality. Alternatives in dealing with the issue would have been discussed individually with the person concerned. As a worker within the child protection system at the time of the research, I was obliged to notify should these disclosures allege abuse. This was outlined in the initial meeting as well as in the "group rules" set down at the onset of the group. These group rules were devised with the group to ensure safety, respect and confidentiality of all group members.

Should an allegation of abuse be made in the course of the research the facilitator would have spoken with the participant in the first instant to empower the young person to speak about the abuse with the appropriate Departmental person. They would already be aware of my obligations to ensure their safety.

If at any time a participant appeared distressed at what was being discussed, the facilitator would have stopped the discussion and tried to resolve the distress before proceeding. The participant always had the option of withdrawal and/or opportunity to discuss the issue further in a confidential environment.

Confidentiality and Privacy

With the exception of disclosure of abuse, nothing that happened during the interviews or groups would be reported outside of the research process in a way that would identify participants. Only the researcher had access to confidential research materials and the identity of participants would be protected in any reports or articles arising from the research.

Aside from the facilitator, no adult was present unless a young person specifically requested it. In such cases the adult was required to sign the Confidentiality Protocol. The other children participating in the group would have also been consulted. If the other participants were not happy for the adult to be included, the requesting child would have been offered an alternative individual time slot with the inclusion of the support person. No child who took part in the research requested an adult be present at the art group.

The researcher has signed the James Cook University Confidentiality Protocol for Researchers, Research Assistants and Research Administrative Assistants, which was devised as part of the ARC Linkage research project with the Mackay/Whitsunday Regional Department of Families. Research data will be retained, as per NHMRC guidelines.

Any identifying marks on the artwork such as names or signatures have been erased in their reproduction in order to ensure anonymity.

Data Analysis

Given the historical disempowerment experienced by children, young people and Indigenous community members, an inclusive empowerment-based methodology was used (Gibbs, 2001, p. 29). Participants were invited to contribute in order to promote improvements to their care system. The study utilised methods and techniques whereby all participants were respected and their strengths were reinforced. In line with “strengths based practice” frameworks (Bernard, 2002), participants were recognised as being experts in their own lived experience.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.... frequently it interprets various aspects of a research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). 'A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response of meaning within the data set' (the data being used from all the data collected for a particular analytical aim) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). I have taken a theoretical thematic approach in the analysis in order to discuss how these themes play out across the data.

The common fields used in the data analysis included gender, care status, age and cultural identification. Information that can have a big impact on self-esteem and sense of self, such as level of abuse, neglect and contact with family was also collected from a combination of Departmental files (both electronic and paper based), the workers and the children themselves, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the vicissitudes of each young person's lived experience. This level of data collection enabled the interviews to be viewed within a context, which allowed for greater depth in data analysis.

In keeping with the Foucaultian framework that underpins this research, information collected also included family configuration such as number and age of siblings, separation, divorce and deaths, number of schools attended, number of foster homes and Departmental caseworkers, as all of these factors in combination can have an impact on a young person's life and self-esteem.

The Interview Sample

It was important that the interview sample included a cross-section of ages of participants. A breakdown of the research sample by interview type is found in Table 2.

Table 2: Research Sample for Interview Type

Age	Individual interview	Group	Both Individual Interview and Group	Total
5- 10	3	2	3	8
11-13	2		2	4
14-17	8			8
Total	13	2	5	20

Culture

The use of the word Indigenous in the research is deliberate. As explored in more detail in the next chapter, all of the children and young people in the research who were identified as Indigenous came from more than one culture. Table 3 explores this further, however a complete analysis is available in Table 5 in the next chapter.

Table 3: Research Sample by Culture

Age	Indigenous	Indigenous/ Anglo	Anglo	Indigenous/ Anglo/ Asian	Other
5-10	3	3		2	1
11-13		2		1	1
14-17	1	3	1	2	1
Total	4	8	1	5	3

It must be noted here that there were three young people in care who were unaware of their Aboriginality. The Aboriginal identity of these young people became known to the researcher during an interview with an older sibling. This young person was still grappling with the knowledge and had not informed her younger siblings. Given the way in which this information was imparted to her by her mother and the level of denial she articulated during the interview around her Aboriginality, along with having no relationship with the Department, one could surmise that the Department remained unaware of this change in status. These children have been included as Indigenous/Anglo as this aspect needed to be considered during the art making analysis.

Of the three participants listed under other, one was Chinese (Hong Kong), one was Anglo/African and the third was of Anglo/Dutch origin.

Table 4 outlines participants in terms of age, gender and care status.

Table 4: Research Sample by Gender and In Care Status

Age	Male	Female	In Care	Not in Care
5-10	3	5	5	3
11-13	0	4	2	2
14-17	3	5	6	2
Total	6	14	13	7

Given the qualitative nature of the research, the gender imbalance amongst participants was not viewed as a serious issue as it was only in one age group, the 11-13 year olds, that males remained unrepresented. It is interesting to note that boys in this age group were not considered by the Department as suitable to participate in the art group.

Art Making Analysis

Theorising about creativity and its linkages to the unconscious mind in western theory stems back to Freud and Jung. Jung defined creativity as a product of inner feelings, beliefs and thoughts. The general function of creative expression is to restore psychological function via symbolic meaning (Jung, 1964). To Kramer *‘art is an area wherein experiences can be chosen, varied, repeated at will. In the creative act, conflict can be re-experienced, resolved and integrated’* (1958, p. 6). The actual art making process sets up a dialogue with the self. To Laing, *‘every original art production by the patient is in some degree an aspect of that person. No-one can create the same result...art offers an area where the patient can proclaim their identity and it offers an atmosphere where he can be himself... Art offers a medium which can give both communication with others and confrontation with the self’* (1974, p. 17).

Research into affective values of line, colour and form date back to 1919 with Lundholm's research into classic masterpieces and later in research that explored line variances and emotion (Lundholm, 1924, Krietler, 1972). These and other studies concluded that lines are expressive and hold meanings that are personal and/or culturally shared. For example, people in the research expressed agitated emotions in irregular, jagged and sharp angled lines, in contrast to calmer states of mind that are more likely expressed in gently curved lines. Study into other image components such as the relationship of components to each other and colour use, continued into the 1970's (Kennedy, 1979).

Interpretation of the artwork to Case and Dalley, 'involves making conscious unconscious processes and puts an understanding of this process into words' (1992, p. 65). Hence one of the advantages of using images is their concrete nature, which invites visual interpretation that can enhance meaning and understanding.

As a professionally trained Arts Therapist I included certain elements as part of my analysis of the artwork. The art making analysis in this research included:

- Subject matter
- Use and choice of media
- How the work was executed (e.g. slowly, quickly, precisely, haphazardly, compulsively etc.)
- How the elements were placed and in what order
- Was the work complete?
- Did they show pride in their work?
- Were they able to prescribe meaning and/or name the work?
- What did they choose to do with the work once complete?

In this way the themes, media usage and process could be analysed against gender, culture and care status.

The reliability and accuracy of using drawings as an assessment tool has also been challenged (Thomas, 1998). Although even in Thomas' study, it is noted that drawings can be influenced by a child's emotional attitude towards the topic depicted. Projective tests such as the Rorschach (Rorschach, and Oberholzer, 1923), the *Draw-A-Person Test* (Goodenough, 1926), and the *Kinetic Family Drawing* (Burns, 1982), enabled new ways to assess personality and interpersonal dynamics with these techniques still in use (Exner, 1976, Hadler & Habenicht, 1994).

In Kinetic Family Drawing, certain characteristics of the drawing are noted upon analysis, such as the placement of family members; the absence of any members; whether the figures are relatively consistent with reality or altered by the child; the absence of particular body parts; erasures; elevated figures; and so on.

Family Art Psychotherapy theoretically combines dynamically orientated Art Therapy (Naumberg, 1966) and Family Systems Theory (Ackerman, 1966; Haley, 1971). In this form of Art Therapy the therapist makes certain points of observation during the process of the art making (Landgarten, 1987). Spacing in drawings has also been viewed as an indicator of emotional closeness by a number of researchers (Fury, Carlson & Sroufe, 1997, Tharinger & Stark, 1990). Research has also suggested that the omission of figures or objects in drawings is indicative of psychological absence, conflict and/or denial of the omitted (Furth, 1998, Peterson & Hardin, 1997).

For art works in this research that depicted family and/or self, the following elements were analysed:

- Who was drawn first?
- Who was included/excluded?
- What expressions are they wearing?
- What media was used?
- Who looks like whom?
- Are there any features or limbs missing?

- Who is placed next to whom?
- Who takes up most space and who the least?
- What are the figures doing?
- Where and how are the figures placed on the page?

These elements were tabled in order to analyse data across a number of data sets that, together with the narrative, can provide insight into family relationship dynamics and the potential impact on identity. Commonalities in parameters were analysed against culture, gender and care status. These elements were further explored through narrative questioning where possible.

Landgarten also explored art medium on a continuum of control beginning with lead pencil as offering the most control down to wet clay, which offers the least (1987, p. 7). I have assessed the research against this control continuum as part of my analysis in Chapter Seven.

There are various forms of questioning that could have been utilised in order to allow the narrative to emerge. For Shaverien, the artwork allows for a three-way relationship, that is, non-confrontational conversation can occur through and via the artwork (1999, 2010).

The artist was asked to speculate on what various elements within the work might say to each other. For example in *Artwork 23* as part of the dialogue with the work, Summer was asked:

“What would K (the dog) say to Mum?”

“What would Summer say to Mum?” and so on.

In this way analysis of the elements within the artwork is made possible.

Adults

In line with the research aims, interviews were conducted with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Child Protection workers in order to ascertain their thoughts on identity, along with space to reflect on what was actually occurring in practice. Workers from Aboriginal and Islander Foster Care and Child Protection Agency Inc. (AICCA) were approached as a team and asked to participate in the research. The management and the Elders who inform the organisation were fully aware and had supported the research in-kind prior to approaching the workers.

Workers could arrange a time and place that best suited them. Similarly I was invited to attend a workgroup meeting at the Department of Child Safety to present my research and ask for volunteer participants. Of the four workers who volunteered, two Indigenous workers from the eleven participants in this meeting volunteered and opted to be interviewed together as part of the research. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

In line with recent research conducted by Indigenous researchers, the voices and experiences of Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander community members have been privileged (Martin, 2003). Narrative, which is part of Indigenous cultural tradition was encouraged. The researcher was also guided by Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander protocols such as *Mackay and District Australian South Sea Islander Association Protocol Guide*, *Protocols for consultation and negotiation with Aboriginal People* and *James Cook University Protocols for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

The Worker Question Prompt Sheet (*Appendix J*), which comprised eight open-ended questions, was utilised as a prompt within a conversational format in order to encourage narrative input.

- What does identity mean to you?
- Do you think identity is important?
- How is identity formed?

- What influences identity?
- What's your view about identity and children in care?
- What theory bases do you use in your work when dealing with identity issues?
- In practice how do you deal with these issues?
- Do you think different issues face Indigenous children and young people in regards to identity?

Within the theoretical thematic approach utilised the gender and cultural identity of participants was deemed pertinent. The analysis of these interviews is detailed in Chapter Eight of this document entitled *On Working with Children and Identity*.

Chapter Nine discusses the research findings, practice issues and conclusions.

This research is set within a relatively small urban community that involves a small study sample hence it does not make claims to generalisability. That being said, findings are generalisable with critical appraisal, to elsewhere in Australia. For example, the findings are partially applicable in the remote Australian context that shares the same systemic issues but where multi-cultural identity is less likely to occur. The interviews were also conducted at a particular point in time; in a particular location hence the data collected is authentic within this context.

It is now time to introduce the children.

Chapter Five

Participants' Profiles and Vicissitudes of Life

This chapter seeks to explore each young person's story in order to gain insight and understanding into their world. In depth profiling and family history was gathered utilising information provided by a combination of the young people themselves, out of home care agency staff, Departmental files, foster carers and parents. As a consequence of being involved in a Government system, there is generally more written information available about the children in out of home care, as opposed to solely a verbal narrative given for the children not in care. As discussed in the previous chapters, a Foucaultian framework assumes the importance of individual specificity, as such, information that can have a big impact on self-esteem and sense of self, such as level of abuse, neglect and contact with family was also collected in order to gain a greater understanding of the vicissitudes of each young person's lived experience. This level of data collection enabled the interviews to be viewed within a context, which allowed for a greater depth in data analysis. Information collected also included family configuration including separation, divorce and death, number of schools attended, number of foster homes and Departmental workers, as all of these factors alone, or in combination can have an impact on a young person's life and self-esteem. In the case of four of the participants, Robby (5 years, non-Indigenous, not in care), Lara (12 years, Indigenous/Anglo, in care), Andrew (14 years, Indigenous/Anglo, in care) and Summer (13 years, Afro/Anglo, not in care), I have been able to track the participant's progress over a longer period of time. In the case of Robby, Lara and Andrew I received news of them for some five years after the completion of the research and for Summer I still hear news from time to time.

As mentioned previously, these four participants were known to the researcher outside of the research context, as I lived within the same small community and had some contact with their families and carers.

I also explored the physical presentation of each participant, when exploring identity, self-perception and body image were often issues raised by the young people. I have referred to skin colour, as the participants at times referred to their skin colour when describing themselves. There is also some correlation in relation to those participants who chose not to acknowledge their Indigenous heritage and skin colour.

Research Sample

Table 5, below displays the research sample against the common data fields, that is, gender, culture, care status, number of schools attended and number of placements. It also documents sibling groups and these have been placed together at the top of the table.

Table 5: Research Sample

Name	Age	Cultural Background	M	F	In Care	Relative Carer	Not In Care	Siblings interviewed	No of Schools attended	No of Placements
Tracey	7	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X			Mary	5	10
Mary	12	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X			Tracey	6	12
Tom	8	ASSI Aboriginal	X			X		Tony	1	3
Tony	10	ASSI Aboriginal	X			X		Tom	1	3
Heidi	6	TSI ASSI Anglo Malay Aboriginal		X			X	Nelly	1	N/A
Nelly	16	TSI ASSI Anglo Malay Aboriginal		X			X	Heidi	2	N/A
Kristy	8	ASSI Aboriginal Chinese Scottish		X			X	Kate	2	N/A
Kate	11	ASSI Aboriginal Chinese Scottish		X			X	Kristy	1	N/A
Alice	10	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X			Lara Beth Andrew	1	1
Lara	12	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X			Andrew Alice Beth	5	2
Andrew	14	Anglo Aboriginal	X		X			Lara Alice Beth	5	2
Beth	16	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X			Lara Andrew Alice	5	2
Robby	4	Anglo Dutch	X				X		1	N/A
Abbey	8	ATSI Anglo		X		X			2	2
Summer	13	Afro Anglo		X			X		< 10	N/A
Dan	14	Aboriginal TSI	X		X				< 10	6
Ryan	15	Chinese (HK)	X		X				< 10	4
Betty	17	Anglo Aboriginal		X	X				< 10	<10
Naomi	17	Vanuatu Aboriginal TSI Chinese		X			X		1	
Kim	17	Anglo Australian		X	X				< 10	<10
TOTALS			6	14	10	3	7	12		

Over half (12) of the young people interviewed were part of a sibling group, with five siblings groups in total.

The inclusion of sibling groups allowed for a greater cross-comparison to occur for children from similar backgrounds. Two of the five sibling groups were not in out of home care. Of the siblings in out of home care, two sets of two resided together.

Six of the participants were male and fourteen were female. Thirteen children were in out of home care, with three of these children living with a relative/kinship carer. Only two participants were of a single culture and only one of these was Anglo Australian the other was Chinese. Twelve participants were identified with two cultures, five were identified with four or five cultures. The most common mix was Anglo/Aboriginal with seven in total.

Schools

Five respondents had attended ten or more schools. Only one of these children was not in care. Of the four that were in care, three had been repeatedly excluded or expelled. These same three respondents have also experienced multiple placements and multiple placement breakdowns. Of the children over eleven years of age, only one respondent who was not in care, had attended one school. Three had attended five schools, two had attended six schools one had attended four. It was clear from this research that the children in care interviewed, generally attended a greater number of schools than those not in care. For those children eleven years and under, seven had attended only one school. One child had attended two schools and one had attended seven schools, both of these children were in out of home care. The exceptions to this pattern were Tom and Tony, who had only attended one school. This was perhaps indicative of the stable, familial nature of their placement.

Number of Placements

Two respondents had been in the same placement since coming into care. Three children had lived in two placements, two had lived in three placements, one had lived in four placements, one had lived in six and four had lived in ten or more placements. Of this last group all were female, have been in long-term care, have been victims of sexual abuse and domestic violence and are viewed as being hard to place by the Department due to their aggressive and/or sexualised behaviours.

The Participants' Profiles

In order to aid the narrative content of the children's stories, siblings have been grouped together. Otherwise, the children have been grouped by age.

Robby - Age 5, not in care

Robby is a five year old Anglo/Dutch boy who has never been in out of home care. He lives on a small rural property with his nuclear family. He has two younger siblings. He presents as small for his age, slender, fair featured, talkative and happy.

His mother from Holland met his father whilst travelling around Australia. Both parents are well connected to the extended family. Robby has been to Holland several times and his maternal family visit regularly. Most of his paternal family live nearby. Since the completion of this research, Robby's paternal grandfather has died.

Robby had started school the year the research was conducted and was enjoying the school environment and his new-found friends. It was not surprising that Robby's new best friend featured highly in his artwork. Robby was interviewed in the garden on the property where he resides and chose not to attend an art group.

Heidi - Age 6, not in care

Heidi is a six year old Torres Strait Islander/South Sea Islander/Aboriginal/Malay/Anglo girl not in out of home care. Nelly is Heidi's sixteen year old half-sibling who was also interviewed as part of this research. Heidi has attended one school and resides with her birth parents and her six sisters or half-sisters. Heidi is the youngest child. She attends church regularly with her family. Heidi presented as of average build, dark featured and happy, if a little shy. Like her older sister she felt very close to her extended family and spoke of them regularly throughout the interview. She enjoyed school, her friends and art. Heidi chose to be interviewed in a child friendly space²⁹ and not to participate in an art group.

Nelly - age 16, not in care

Nelly is a sixteen year old Torres Strait Islander/Aboriginal/Anglo/South Sea Islander/Malay girl, not in care. She presents as an outgoing, articulate, dark featured, attractive teenager. She talked easily about her family, her thoughts and what was important to her. Her birth father died when she was young and her mother had since remarried. She stated that she considered her step-father as her father, as they still lived in a close knit family unit. Nelly talked of having a close relationship with her mother.

Nelly's family was also deeply involved in the church as discussed above, and she was very connected to her extended family, her culture and her totem (the Frangipani). Many of her birth father's Torres Strait Islander family members lived locally and Nelly identified strongly with her father's Torres Strait Islander culture. She is the third oldest amongst seven siblings which included five sisters or half-sisters.

Nelly attended school regularly and was a member of a touch football team. She also enjoyed art. She described having a number of close friends she has kept throughout her schooling.

On the whole, Nelly felt happy and competent, but also described being self-critical regarding her looks, worried about being fat and would often diet. Nelly chose to be interviewed in a child and young person friendly space.

²⁹ Child and young person friendly space was a space, which included items such as beanbags, pictures on the walls and art and play materials, which was located in therapeutic practice.

Tracey - Age 7, in care

Tracey is fair haired and complexioned and slightly built. She is the younger sibling of Mary who was also part of this research. Tracey is seven years old and is of Anglo/Aboriginal decent. Like her siblings, Tracey had been in and out of care for most of her life, until five years ago when both Mary and Tracey came into long-term care until the age of eighteen. Tracey's mother had suffered Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from an early age, along with drug-abuse with reoccurring bouts of severe depression. She would, at regular intervals voluntarily hospitalise herself in order to receive Electric Convulsive Therapy as a way to help manage her depression. She would also regularly find caring for her eight children, who ranged in age from fifteen to one year old twins, difficult. At these times she would seek help from community and social services, which regularly meant placing the children into short-term, out of home care. Tracey's step-father was incarcerated for severe domestic violence towards both the mother and children. It wasn't long after his incarceration that Tracey's mother committed suicide. Subsequently all eight children entered into long-term care.

Tracey's Aboriginal birth father was estranged until her mother's death. Tracey's father lives interstate and remains inconsistent in his contact, often not turning up or phoning as arranged. There were interstate reports of domestic violence between Tracey and Mary's father and mother when they were married. There had also been more recent disclosures by older half-siblings of sexual abuse perpetrated by their birth father. Initially, after their mother's death, there were plans to reunify Tracey and Mary, with their birth father but the Department, due to these later disclosures curtailed these plans. Some contact still occurs with her step-father who, though no longer incarcerated, remains homeless, suffers from depression and is diagnosed with Bi-Polar Disorder.

Tracey has had over ten placements with over five changes in schools and was also known to bully younger children at school and was not meeting educational milestones. She was placed for a time with the majority of her siblings but due to her aggressive behaviours, she was separated from her siblings and placed in a placement by herself.

There were also reports of Tracey's severe cruelty to animals. Abuse and/or killing of pets is often used by perpetrators of domestic violence as a part of their abusive behaviours (Tabault, 1999, Herman, 1992). Herman describes the 'characteristic pattern' of control and violence experienced by domestic violence victims in testimonials, which highlight enforcing children to witness the sadistic abuse of pets (Herman, 1992, p. 98)³⁰.

This was certainly the case for Tracey's whilst she was living with her step-father. As a result of this exposure children may mimic this behaviour.

There were reported ongoing concerns for Tracey's mental health but up to the time of the interview, no mental health assessment had taken place. At present she is placed with an older carer who has no other children in the placement. Should this placement break down, Tracey would be classed as 'difficult to place' due to her behaviours along with the fact that at present she is a threat to other children.

Tracey had previously been involved in counselling over a fairly long period of time with a number of different counsellors³¹, but now refuses to engage. Her carer continued to voice grave concerns for her wellbeing, as she was displaying increasingly high levels of risk-taking behaviours and suicidal ideation. There were also plans for the majority of her siblings to move some 1200 kms away, so leaving her as the only remaining sibling permanently living in the area.

Prior to the death of her mother, no contact had occurred with the extended maternal family who reside interstate. This was due solely to the mother's wishes. Since her death, some contact has occurred with the maternal grandparents and extended family. This highlights another issue that undoubtedly affects a child's sense of estrangement from their extended family.

30 As cited in The American Humane Society Factsheet, 71% of pet-owning women entering women's shelters reported that their batterer had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets for revenge or to psychologically control victims; 32% reported their children had hurt or killed animals; 68% of battered women reported violence towards their animals. 87% of these incidents occurred in the presence of the women, and 75% in the presence of the children, to psychologically control and coerce them. 13% of intentional animal abuse cases involve domestic violence.

<http://www.americanhumane.org/about-us/newsroom/fact-sheets/animal-abuse-domestic-violence.html#sources>

31 This highlights the issue of staff retention in the human services particularly in rural and remote areas.

It is often the case that parents will withhold contact information from social service departments for a variety of reasons. In Tracey's case, her mother had had a fall-out with her family of origin years before and she had refused to provide contact information, or help facilitate the children to have contact with her estranged family. Her mother also did not want any contact with her ex-partner (Tracey's father), which inhibited any contact with the paternal side of the family.

Tracey arrived to take part in the initial art group and from the start did not engage.

She remained isolated from the group and spent much of the time wandering around, sitting next to the facilitator without talking or sitting on the floor, slumped in a corner. Any attempts to engage with her were ignored. She did start to create an artwork but discarded the work once complete to sit in the corner in view of the rest of the group.

Mary - Age 12, in care

Mary is Aboriginal/Anglo, of slender build, very fair featured and is Tracey's twelve year old sibling, and as such shares much of her sister's history. Like Tracey, Mary was taken into permanent foster care some five years ago. Mary and Tracey are the only two siblings in the family who share the same father. Mary lives with her three younger half-siblings and one older half-brother. Prior to this placement, Mary has been in approximately twelve placements and has had to move schools several times as a consequence of either being placed with a new carer, or the carer relocating. This current placement has been the most stable in that she has resided there for two years. The carer also has three of her own children all under the age of ten. Mary's two older half-brothers live some distance away and have transitioned from care. At the time of the interview Mary was due to move some 1200 kms away with her carer's family and her four half-siblings. This move was due to the carer's relationship breakdown.

Since the breakdown there have been disclosures by the carer's mother and Mary as to alleged incidences of domestic violence before and after the separation, perpetrated by the foster father.

The carer had also expressed concern to the researcher about what she described as Mary's "deep seated identity issues." The carer stated that Mary disowned her father and her Aboriginality and wanted to change her surname to that of her older sibling's deceased father, whom she had never met. She also felt that Mary held deep anger issues and that she often hurts her younger siblings. The carer was distraught in not being able to deal with issues in that Mary refused to speak about her feelings as she saw this as counselling, an idea to which she was now hostile. Mary too, had been to counselling for a number of years with several different counsellors and agencies.

Mary took part in both the art workshop and in-depth interview. The interview took place ten days before she was due to leave the area in an outdoor space she nominated. During the interview she spoke at length about the move, the carer's relationship breakdown and leaving her school and friends. Also a big issue for her was leaving the farm animals (as she lived on a farming property) she also spoke of all the things she had to throw away as a consequence of the move.

Mary spoke at length about having to leave her pet cat behind as it seems this was the animal she felt closest to, and held a special affection for. Like many children removed from their parents, over the years Mary had lost many treasured possessions, pets and mementoes.

During the initial art group, Mary kept mainly to herself and separated herself from the rest of the group, including her sibling Tracey, whom she virtually ignored. During the interview, Mary appeared to be distant and sad, which may be as a result of the grief and loss she expressed about leaving during the interview.

Abbey - Age 8, in care

Abbey is eight years old, Indigenous³²/Anglo, dark featured and of average size for her age. Her parents have been known to the Department for many years before her birth. Her two oldest siblings had been in and out of care prior to 1986 for a variety of reasons including; domestic violence between her parents, high level physical violence perpetrated by the mother on the children, neglect due to alcohol abuse by the mother and suspected sexual abuse by visitors to the home.

³² Indigenous is used here as this what it states in her file. However the CSSO at the interview said that her father was Torres Strait/Aboriginal.

The younger of the two also had severe asthma. The mother's alcohol abuse resulted in the mother being unavailable to administer medication when needed, which ultimately led to this child's death. Reports suggest that the older brother would act as the parent and protector for his younger sibling and left home at an early age. Sections of Abbey's extended family have a long history of intergenerational foster care and Departmental involvement.

Abbey was one of three children in the family born after 1990, along with an older brother, now eleven and a younger sister, now four. By this stage the parents had separated and the mother was living spasmodically with a new partner, (T). The mother's alcoholism had escalated whereby at times she was unconscious and hospitalised. At these times Abbey's then eight year old brother would try and contact the father but often found that he too was intoxicated. This led to the children being placed, on and off, into out of home care.

The mother's new relationship was also marred by ongoing domestic violence, which was described as "chronic" by Departmental staff and further escalating alcohol abuse. The children were put into a variety of emergency care situations, but were returned each time when things were perceived by child protection workers to have settled down at home. At these times, Abbey's brother would act as primary carer for his sister, with the children enduring continued physical violence perpetrated by both their mother and T. At this time their mother became pregnant with child number five.

Abbey, together with her brother continued to care for and protect their new baby sister, who, Departmental reports suggest may have Foetal Alcohol Syndrome. At this stage the mother was living separately from (T), but the abuse and reliance on alcohol continued. There were also reports of unhygienic living conditions, non-attendance at school and Abbey's then ten year old brother (R), being seen with beer and cigarettes. (R) had also tried to attempt suicide by hanging, began acting aggressively towards his mother and younger siblings and was displaying sexualised behaviours.

Abbey and her two siblings were placed with the same family carer, who had to place a domestic and family violence order against their mother due to her abusive behaviours towards them.

At this stage, both Abbey and her brother requested no contact with their mother, as reports suggest that they did not believe that she would ever stop drinking and they no longer wanted to be with her when she was intoxicated. The children had also formed some attachment with (T), who still lived separately away from their mother. Abbey spoke of missing (T) and that how, at times he acted as their “*protector*.” She described him as “*having been around a long time*” and she called both her birth father and (T), Dad.

Abbey was interviewed with an Indigenous Family and Community Worker (FCW) with whom she was familiar present, in a place she nominated. Abbey’s relationship with the FCW was a positive influence for Abbey in that the worker has known Abbey for some three years and this same worker was able to relay concerns to the caseworker regarding contact.

Kristy - Age 8, not in care

Kristy is eight years old and of Aboriginal/South Sea Islander/Chinese/Scottish decent. Kristy has never been in care and resides with her family of origin that includes, Kate, her sister who was also part of this research, birth mother, father and several older brothers. Kristy is the youngest child in a family of six children and she and Kate are the only female siblings. Their birth father is an Aboriginal Elder and both Kristy and Kate could both trace back their lines of descent that included Aboriginal, South Sea Islander, Chinese and Scottish forbearers. Kate and Kristy felt very close to their extended family and each other and talked easily about their sense of connectedness.

Kristy was very influenced by her older sister and somewhat shy and presented as slender and easy going. She sat next to her sister during the art group and appeared to enjoy the art making and the interactions with other participants. They were able to share easily with the group and encouraged other participants to share the resources and food. She was also very proud of her artwork.

Kate - Age 11, not in care

Kate is eleven years old and of Aboriginal/South Sea Islander/Chinese/Scottish decent. Kate and her eight year old sister Kristy elected to be interviewed together. Kate is tall for her age, dark featured, slender and outgoing. Like her sister Kristy, Kate has never been in care and she shares her sister's history and living situation. Kate is the second youngest child. Kate, like Kristy felt very close to their extended family and each other. Kate talked easily about their sense of connectedness.

Kate has enjoyed very stable schooling, having attended the same school and living in the same community all her life. Kate's father's strong sense of culture has undoubtedly influenced Kate's sense of cultural identity and connectedness. Of the artworks Kate made during the research it was the 'Dream-catcher', which was deemed more precious by her in that her grandmother taught her how to make it.

Tom - Age 8, in care

Tom is an eight year old boy of Australian South Sea Islander/Aboriginal decent, in out of home care. He has ten siblings ranging in age from nineteen years to three years. Tom lives with his maternal Aunt and one other older sibling, Tony, who was also part of this research. He has lived with the same carer from the age of one, and has attended the same school. His two oldest brothers are no longer in care and both have been involved in the Juvenile Justice system as repeat offenders. The rest of his siblings are spread among other relatives. He sees his younger siblings on parent contact visits, when they occur, but has no contact with his older siblings.

It is important to remember here that in Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander culture the extended family is such, that aunts are considered mothers and uncles as fathers.³³ The family initially became known to the Department over a decade ago, due to ongoing alcohol abuse, torture³⁴ and high level domestic violence perpetrated by their father. Neglect issues were also reported in the mother's 'failure to protect'³⁵.

33 In Torres Strait Islander culture 'informal adoption' between sisters is common.

34 According to the Oxford Dictionary the definition of torture is 'The infliction of severe pain as a punishment or a forcible means of persuasion, a great suffering or anxiety' (2005).

35 'Failure to protect' is a category often contested by feminist organisations. It is argued that in cases of domestic violence the onus is put on the mother to change the situation in order to protect her children. It is often the case that partners who perpetrate do not engage with the Department and thus it is argued that it is left up to the disempowered domestic violence victim to change the situation in order to keep her children.

There have been periodic unsuccessful attempts at reunification with his parents over the years until the children began disclosing ongoing sexual abuse that had occurred during these reunification attempts. Tom and Tony have been on recurrent two-year Guardianship orders since they came into care.³⁶ The parents are also known to leave the area without notice for substantial periods of time and are uncontactable at these times. Tom is of average height and build and dark featured. Tom spent much of the group time with his brother, was very influenced by what his brother was doing and he chose to use similar colours and the same media as his older sibling.

The longevity, high level and multiple types of abuse Tom has suffered could predispose him to PTSD. The fact that the abuse happened at such an early age of development would likely have affected his neuro-pathway development, however that he is now in a stable familial environment may prove beneficial in this regard. His behaviour at school is reported to have deteriorated. At the time of this research Tom was being screened for ADHD.

Tom elected to participate in the art group and he exhibited some issues in sharing the food and art materials with the rest of the group, which included his brother and some cousins. Just before he and his brother were due to arrive for the interview, according to the FCW that transported Tony, Tom decided he wanted to stay home and play.

Tony - Age 10, in care

Tony is a ten year old boy of Australian South Sea Islander/Aboriginal decent and is in care. Like his brother Tom, Tony was placed with two other relatives before settling into his current placement. He describes himself as brown and presents as being of average height and weight for his age. Tony has been in out of home care from the age of one. Tony shares the same history of abuse as his brother Tom.

During the interview Tony displayed a high level of anger towards his father and wanted to change his last name (to his mother's maiden name), hence disowning any relational connection to his father.

³⁶ At the time of this research it was common practice to grant recurrent two-year guardianship orders as reunification attempts continue. As a consequence the children seem to 'drift in care', which results in a sense of instability and short-term case planning.

Tony's repressed anger and possible PTSD as a consequence of the high level and longitudinal nature of the abuse he suffered, if left unchecked could cause ongoing problems for him. Tony was already displaying behavioural difficulties as reported to the Department by the school and was diagnosed with ADHD.

Like Tom, he has little to no contact with his older siblings with whom he nonetheless holds in high regard. However, the Aunt with whom Tony lives is well linked into extended family and the church community. Both Tony and his brother Tom attend church weekly and much of their extended maternal family attend. The stability and family orientated nature of Tony and Tom's placement represent some welcome resiliency building factors.

During the interview Tony talked about all his family connections and of visiting the Islands to see extended family, leaving no doubt as to the importance of extended family, community and culture to his sense of identity.

During the initial art group and in the interview situation Tony interacted well and talked of enjoying the process. Tony like Abbey also had a positive relationship with a male Aboriginal FCW, who had also worked for the Department for a number of years. Unfortunately for Tony, not long after the interview took place, this worker decided to leave the Department.

Alice - Age 10, in care

Alice is a ten year old girl of Anglo/Aboriginal and presents as very shy. She is fair complexioned, large for her age, somewhat overweight and in out of home care. She has three siblings in care who were also part of this research. Her older half-sister Beth, lives a comparatively short distance away in another placement. Her half-siblings, Lara and Andrew live in another town some 1400 kms away. Alice is one of the children in this research who is unaware of her Aboriginality. She has lived with the same non-Indigenous foster carer since coming into care when she was three years old. Her foster family consists of foster parents, whom she refers to as Mum and Dad and two older foster brothers.

Alice's birth mother has an intellectual impairment which impacts upon her ability to care. Their birth mother is in a new relationship and has a one year old child from this relationship. Alice spends an hour a month on access visits with her mother and her mother's new family and enjoys this time as a way to catch up with her new little half-brother. Contact in terms of frequency and duration has remained the same for a number of years according to Alice and Beth, which appears to indicate a lack of case review. Alice sometimes shares these visits with her older half-sister, Beth. These visits are her only contact with Beth outside of the twice-yearly visits with Andrew and Lara, and are usually organised by the foster carers. Alice does not have contact with any other extended family members.

Alice and Beth reside in a different physical area to the other children in the research and thus deal with a different Child Safety Office. I chose to include them in the study as it would provide information during the analysis with regards to how well different half-siblings fared, along with possible practice issues around contact and access when physical distance and cross-office relations, policy and procedure need to be considered. In this particular case, Alice and Beth did not have a designated worker at their local Child Safety Office and the case has remained unallocated for a considerable amount of time. There is much anecdotal evidence³⁷ to support the practice of 'case hierarchy' in cases where offices are understaffed and/or are carrying large caseloads.

It is often the cases perceived as 'stable', such as in the case of Beth and Alice, whereby the case is delegated to a Team Leader to react upon if something should happen to destabilise the placement. The cases of Beth and Alice highlight how easily such children can 'drift in care', with issues such as the mother's disclosure of her Aboriginality not being addressed in terms of what this may mean for Alice. Alice has had no contact with the Department for a number of years. Alice was interviewed in her half-sibling's, Lara and Andrew's, foster home, in a place she nominated.

Of note in the case of Alice as evidenced in her interview, was her total lack of trust and the ongoing effects of removal. The level of fear that this will happen again in her current placement was paramount during the interview.

37 I have seen this practice occur regularly in both Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Alice displayed a high level of attachment towards her foster mother and hid her artwork away as soon as it was finished, to give to her foster mother.

The interviews took place during a bi-yearly contact visit, which also allowed me to observe the siblings together. Alice would often remain separate from her siblings when there was a group activity happening. Lara and Andrew are both boisterous in their communication style, unlike Alice who was incredibly shy, somewhat reserved and talked very quietly.

Lara - Age 12, in care

Lara is a twelve year old Anglo/Aboriginal girl who, at the time of writing, had no knowledge of her Aboriginality. Lara is Alice's half-sister. Lara presents with olive complexion, fair-hair, tall for her age, slender, extroverted, relaxed and talkative. Lara came into out of home care when she was a baby and shares a placement with her half-brother, Andrew. Apart from several months in respite care, they have been with the same foster care family since coming into care.

Their foster carers have five older children of their own. Five years prior to the interview, their foster carer's relationship broke down, which resulted in the foster mother moving out and starting another relationship. Lara's foster mother has since remarried. Her new partner has three boys to a previous relationship. Lara calls her original foster parents Mum and Dad.

After the marital separation, the foster mother, at first, fought to keep Lara and Andrew with her. Meanwhile the foster father had gone abroad for an extended period of time. Upon his return he was informed that the children had been placed with another foster carer. The foster mother had found their behaviours difficult to deal with, which, she felt, was having an impact on her new relationship. The foster mother chose to cease contact with the children.

The foster father then approached the Department for sole foster care of Lara and Andrew. At this time his fifteen year old son and twenty one year old daughter, also lived in the household. The daughter cared for Lara and Andrew several days a week whilst her father worked away. The relationship between Lara and her foster sister became soured as the foster sister found it difficult to cope with looking after the two children along with her own eighteen-month-old son. The foster sister was taking a trip to see her mother and planned to take Lara with her in the hope that her mother would take her back into her care.

The visit went well and it was decided to trial Lara living there over the holidays with a view to her remaining there. The honeymoon was short lived however, and not long after the beginning of the school term the placement with her foster mother completely broke down and Lara moved back to live with her foster father, brother, foster sister and foster brother.

It was at this point in time that the interviews took place. Not long after the interviews, the foster father expressed his difficulty in dealing with their behaviours and so approached the Department regarding putting them into boarding school. The Department agreed to place them in a boarding school some 400 kms away. The boarding schools were single sex, hence Lara would no longer be attending the same school as Andrew. Lara experienced great difficulty settling in to this new school environment and requested to come home on numerous occasions, which were always denied. Lara's grades had also been slipping for some time according to her foster father, hence academic expectations for Lara were not high. Lara graduated from boarding school with low grades.

Lara has a strong attachment to Andrew and her foster family. Her birth mother lives many hours drive away and contact has been spasmodic and not always positive. As discussed, Lara's mother has an intellectual impairment. During the interview Lara stated that "*she never really liked*" her mother, whom she calls by her first name. They have irregular phone contact. Lara has never had contact with her birth father. There is some limited phone contact with the maternal grandmother.

Lara's problematic attachment and ambivalent relationship with her birth mother has been mirrored in her response to her foster mother's perceived betrayal and rejection. Lara displayed a high level of resilience in wanting to "try again" with her foster mother but also articulated a high level of confusion at her foster mother's response of wanting no contact with her when she relinquished responsibility for Lara and Andrew. Lara had held high hopes for her reunification with her foster mother, however her hopes were dashed after approximately three months into the move. The majority of these three months took place during the extended school holiday break. It appears once Lara had to attend a new school, Lara's "holidaying at mum's" needed to transform into a more regimented and organised schedule.

Like many placements, the 'honeymoon' period often experienced in new placements can become disturbed when the day-to-day reality of work and school impinges.

Lara has two other half-siblings, Alice and Beth who are also part of this research, who are in out of home care whom, she sees around twice a year when visits can be arranged. Her foster father usually instigates these visits and has had Lara's half-siblings both stay with him occasionally during the school holidays. These half-siblings live in close physical proximity to their birth mother and so when Lara and Andrew do travel down to see their siblings, an access visit with their birth mother usually occurs. Lara's birth mother has made her Aboriginality known to her half-sister Beth, however at the time of the interview Lara remained unaware of her Aboriginality.

Lara has been to several schools as her foster family moved and circumstances changed. Lara has attended the current school for two years. Lara was interviewed in her foster home in a place she nominated. Lara produced more artwork than any other respondent (a total of five) and was able to explore concepts like "my personality" and "feelings" within the works. Most recent news of Lara indicates that she has moved back to the area and is unemployed.

Andrew - Age 14, in care

Andrew presents as a, blonde haired, fair complexioned, happy, articulate and confident fourteen year old of Anglo/Aboriginal descent. Like his half-sister Lara, he remains unaware of his Aboriginal heritage. He shares a similar history to Lara in that he was placed with the same foster carers at the age of three. Andrew has a strong attachment to Lara and his foster family. Andrew also has a strong attachment to his friends in the area and has attended the same school for the past two years. Like Lara, he has never had contact with his birth father and during the interview spoke disparagingly about his birth mother, whom he also referred to by her first name.

Andrew, like Lara, was sent to boarding school after these interviews took place. Andrew experienced ongoing difficulties at this school and was often in trouble for absconding, lying and refusing to comply. His grades also suffered as a consequence and it is interesting to note that during the interview he spoke of doing well at school so, “he could make something of himself.”

He spoke of his interest in Archaeology and “*making big bucks*” in the mines like his older foster brother was said to be doing. Recent feedback from his foster father suggests that this move to boarding school was detrimental to Andrew’s wellbeing in that he has now left school with poor grades and no career aspirations. He has since moved back to the area and is unemployed.

Andrew spoke about having attended counselling over the past couple of years and quoted anger management strategies during the interview. Andrew had a strained relationship with his foster brother who tended to bully him. Andrew tended to use these strategies in order to control and deny his own anger. He was interviewed in his foster home in a place he nominated.

Beth - Age 15, in care

Beth is a fifteen year old girl of Aboriginal/Anglo decent, she presents as an attractive, blonde, very fair, physically mature young person. She came into care at the age of sixteen months and has been with the same foster family for the duration. Beth is the older half-sibling of Alice, Lara and Andrew. During our discussion she talked openly about her cultural background.

She stated that she is German and English but that she had found out last year from her mother that she is also Aboriginal. She did not identify at all with her Aboriginal heritage and asked me if I noticed she spoke with a different accent which she attributed to her German/English heritage. Beth had never been overseas, and had little contact with people from either culture. Beth was softly spoken with a strong Australian accent.

Beth had been through some recent emotional times with her birth family. Her relationship with her birth mother could only be described as ambivalent at best, as she struggles to come to terms with why she came into care and her family history. Beth has monthly access visits with her mother, although at times has asked not to have access and spoke at length about the trust issues she has with her mother. She refers to her birth parents by their first names.

The year before, she had confronted her mother as to why she came into care. Beth described feelings of disillusionment and betrayal towards her mother. She also spoke about being given “*a box of stuff*” by her maternal grandmother that contained documentation of when her mother was in foster care. This example raises the issue of intergenerational foster care and its affect on identity. Beth articulated deep-seated identity issues, felt unable to trust and had a history of depression.

Beth became upset when she began to talk about her birth father, having had no contact for thirteen years and that he “*has never been there*” for her. Beth stated that she had been attending counselling regularly in the past due to feeling continually miserable and upset, but that she has been unable to go for two months “*because she (the counsellor) has too many clients.*”

Lack of child counsellors as discussed earlier in this thesis is a real issue, particularly for country and remote children, however, Beth lives in a major city and as indicated here, access is still a very real issue. The situation is further exacerbated by not having an allocated case manager who may have been able to provide other options for Beth.

Beth described living in a supportive foster home and called her foster mother Mum and R, her ex-foster father, Dad. Her foster mother has three children with R and a thirteen year old adopted son. Her foster mother remarried some five years before the interviews took place and Beth's new foster father (L) also has older children to a previous relationship who live away from home.

R still has contact with Beth and she has some attachment to him. She refers to him as Dad. She spoke of being grateful to her foster family. She spoke of some difficult feelings for her current foster father L, and refers to him by his first name.

Like her siblings, Beth has changed schools five times, when her foster carer changed location. She also spoke of starting school late and having to repeat year six. Beth was interviewed in her half-sibling's foster home in a place she nominated.

Beth was clearly struggling with coming to terms with her family history, lack of attachment and feelings of betrayal. Beth's tendency to internalise her feelings have led to self-harming behaviours and bouts of depression in the past.

This internalisation was also present in her artwork in that one picture covered over the first picture and the teardrop was covered with a smile. The breakdown of her foster parents marriage five years ago would have coincided with the year Beth had to repeat at school, which indicates that this destabilisation had an adverse impact upon her.

Findings by Palmer suggest that, 'A major issue for a few children (in care) was their real lack of family information', and 'this along with other foster care experiences, could further limit family and child attachments leading to low self-esteem and identity confusion for the child' (cited in Sakinah, Sailahu-Din, Bollman, 1994, p. 130).

I would argue that rather than a few children in care, in the case of this office, it was an all too common practice, as evidenced by McMahon et al, the Reconnect Audit (outlined in Chapter Two) along with the cohort of children in this research. Sakinah et al also found that when youth are separated from their families without opportunities for personal contact or information, they may believe there is no familial or cultural heritage to relate to (1994).

Summer - Age 13, not in care

Summer is a thirteen year old, newly arrived (six weeks) immigrant from England. She identifies as Afro/Anglo. She presents as large for her age, smiles often, is dark featured, bubbly, talkative and very articulate. She lives with her British mother and has never been in out of home care. Her Ghanaian father and her mother separated some years back. The parental relationship had been marred by severe domestic violence and Summer and her mother had fled from England to Scotland in order to flee from the father. In Scotland, Summer experienced high levels of racism at school as they lived in what her mother described as a “*white area*.” Her mother is fair featured and she felt that the racism was intensified in that she was a “*white woman*” with a “*coloured child*.”

Summer still has contact with her father who is in another relationship and remains in London. Summer strongly identified with her Ghanaian background and spoke of wanting to visit Ghana and having some contact with her Ghanaian relatives.

She also has some contact with her maternal family, mainly by phone in that they live in another part of Australia and in America. Her mother had received sponsorship to work in regional Australia. Summer had just started school at the time of the interview and thus was a little apprehensive about starting school in a new country. Summer had already attended twelve different schools but despite this, was doing well academically and generally enjoyed school.

Since the interview took place Summer had moved interstate with her mother three times and had attended another five schools. In the last three schools she became the victim of bullying, cyber-bullying and ‘sexting’³⁸. Summer is now refusing to attend school and has not attended school for a year and a half. She spends much of her time on the internet and her relationship with her mother is somewhat fraught.

Of all the children in the research, Summer arguably has been to more schools and experienced more moves than any other child in the research. As Summer matured, her attitude changed from wanting to participate in school and be engaged, to one of, in Summer’s words, *“What’s the point when we only have to move anyway.”*

Summer was interviewed in a child-friendly space. She created only one artwork, which highlighted the importance of her dog and her mother to her.

Dan - Age 14, in care

Dan is a fourteen year old, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander boy in out of home care. He presents as of average build, dark featured, unhappy and angry. Dan has five half-siblings on his mother’s side. His older sister he stated *“should be in care like me.”* He has little contact with her but spoke of her as living on the streets and as being a chronic inhalant user. His six year old half-sister is in foster care in another Australian city. Another older half-brother lives some 400km away and he has no contact with Dan. Another half-brother died.

His mother grew up on an Aboriginal mission and has an intellectual impairment. She began a new relationship some four years ago and she has three very young children to this relationship. This new partner also has an intellectual impairment. They live in a small caravan and have refused to have Dan live with them, as, according to reports, she does not want to care for him on a permanent basis. Dan has been in care for five years and knows he can never go home to live but does not understand why.

38 Sexting is a term used to describe sexual abuse by text messaging. It has become of high concern in schools across Australia, even in remote areas.

Dan originally came into out of home care as a consequence of his father and uncle allegedly physically abusing him, along with his mother's inability to protect him due to her level of impairment. Dan's father has twenty-three children to a variety of partners, but Dan had no knowledge of these other half-siblings other than that they exist. Dan's father had died the previous year, due to a massive heart attack that occurred as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. Dan exhibited a high level of ambivalence towards his father.

Dan has attended many schools and has been expelled and suspended many times. During the interview he spoke about earning some money working during the school holidays but that he cannot work whilst he is at school. He had been suspended from school at the time of the interview and saw the possibility of being able to work whilst he was suspended. He spoke candidly about using the school expulsion and suspensions system to his own advantage.

Dan was estranged from his extended family and could not articulate what culture he was from. He had been in several different placements since he came into care but each one had failed due to his aggressive and difficult behaviours. He has been in his current placement for a year and shares the placement with five other Indigenous boys in out of home care. The carer is a single Indigenous male.

Dan spoke about running away during the interview and not needing anyone. He described not feeling close to anyone and would happily isolate himself. He has already been regularly involved with the Juvenile Justice system and thus remains at high risk of future involvement given his increased level of risk-taking behaviours.

Ryan - Age 15, in care

Ryan is a fifteen year old, Hong-Kong born Chinese boy who had been in Australia for five years at the time of the interview. He presents as slender, articulate and somewhat shy. He moved here with his step-parents because in his words, he "*left his original parents for his step parent's.*" Ryan had not seen his birth mother from the time he was born. He lived with his "*real dad*" and his step-mother until they separated due to alleged drug trafficking issues and violence. He described running away with his step-mother and new step-father to Australia.

The family firstly went to Brisbane and then to a small coastal town a couple of hours from Brisbane. They then “*moved all around*”, down to Adelaide and finally to a regional centre where he ran away and presented himself to the Department in order to be taken into care. Ryan described on-going domestic violence as they moved around Australia until, as he describes “*I just couldn’t take it anymore.*”

Ryan does not have any full siblings but stated he had half-siblings from his dad and step-mother. He has no contact with these siblings. He has no contact with his extended family. He described himself as a “*parent-hater*” until he went into care. He also described going into care in Adelaide for a month before he was returned home and the family moved.

Ryan had been in several foster homes before going to the current placement where he feels looked after and talked of feeling very grateful. He had lost count of how many schools he had attended. Ryan differed from the other respondents in that he viewed himself as having some agency over being taken into care. He is also the only respondent who first came into care after the age of eleven. Ryan expressed wanting to feel accepted into Australia and liked the perceived freedom of “*Australian culture*”, as compared with Chinese culture, which he perceived as being more rigid. During the interview he talked of giving up the rituals of Chinese culture, such as Chinese New Year. It is interesting to surmise how Ryan would have fared were he placed with Chinese carers.

Ryan was interviewed as part of the initial data collection group and by himself in a place he nominated.

Kim - Age 17, in care

Kim is a thin, fair featured, seventeen year old Anglo Australian girl, who presented as being disengaged from her surroundings and angry. The interview took place at a consultancy/counselling service she visited most days to enhance living skills as she transitioned from care. Kim had been in out of home care from the age of two and will remain on a child protection guardianship order until she transitions from care when she turns eighteen. She is the youngest child out of five siblings.

She came into care as a consequence of high-level domestic violence and sexual abuse. Her parents have separated. She has had a number of placements during her time in out of home care, although the exact number is unclear in the records. She has also been expelled from several schools and she stated that she has lost count of the number of schools she has attended.

According to Departmental files, Kim has some level of developmental impairment, which has had an adverse effect on her level of schooling and school retention. She is also reported to exhibit aggressive behaviours at school. She is considered 'difficult to place', due to her aggressive and drug-taking behaviours. She would also abscond regularly and self-place.³⁹ Like a number of child protection clients, Kim was on 'dual orders' and thus was a client in both the child protection and the Juvenile Justice systems. Kim was disengaged from the school and service systems. Throughout the completion of the questionnaire she voiced negative views about the child protection system as well as particular child protection workers.

Of the young people interviewed, Kim was the only Anglo Australian. She responded to questions about Australian culture by saying such questions were "*stupid*." In terms of her self-esteem and body image, like many seventeen year old girls, she expressed an over-emphasis on her appearance. She viewed herself as of normal weight, yet regularly tried to lose weight by crash dieting. She constantly worried about becoming or being fat, was highly critical of her appearance and was on a diet at the time of the interview.

She did not participate in any clubs or physical activity of any kind and she viewed being fit as of a low priority. She expressed a strong dislike for her body and was prone to drug-taking and chroming⁴⁰, sexualised and binge drinking behaviours.

39 The term 'self-place' is often used in the child protection system for those young people who abscond from their foster care placement and choose to stay elsewhere. These placements are often deemed by case managers to be inappropriate and sometimes unsafe. There are few options open to case managers to move an older child if a child will not stay in a preferred placement and continues to abscond.

40 Chroming describes the taking in of substances and volatile vapors via the nose and trachea. Aerosol propellants are used with plastic bags or straws in order to breathe in from a solvent-soaked rag or container. Usage has been linked to hypoxia, cardiac arrest and brain damage. Chroming is most often used by young people as a cheap form of asphyxiation.

It was learnt some weeks after the interviews took place that Kim had been recently gang-raped, and she had also been physically assaulted by her sister on a unsupervised access visit. Kim had been severely re-traumatised and as such, her risk-taking behaviours and disengagement need to be viewed within this context.

Herman describes self-injury as a 'pathological soothing mechanism', where *'purging and vomiting, compulsive sexual behaviour, compulsive risk-taking or exposure to danger, and the use of psychoactive drugs become the vehicle by which abused children attempt to regulate their emotional states. These self-destructive symptoms are often well established in abused children even before adolescence, and they become much more prominent in the adolescent years'* (1992, p. 111). Kim's self-harming and risk-taking behaviours were documented as escalating. This coupled with her increasing disengagement and imminent transition from care could indicate that Kim is at a high level of risk. Her continual engagement within the justice system also leaves her vulnerable, as any offence she commits from the age of seventeen will mean she will be tried in an adult court.

Betty - Age 17, in care

Betty is seventeen-years-old, in care, fair featured, Indigenous/Anglo and of large build. She has a developmental impairment which makes it difficult for her to conceptualise, attain more than a rudimentary education and thus there were many inconsistencies and contradictions in her interview. She was also very sexually active and displayed many risk-taking behaviours. Child protection workers describe Betty as being "easily led" and had been a victim of sexual abuse on several occasions. She had also at times become sexually involved with men many years her senior.

These behaviours put her at a high level of ongoing risk. She was currently being transitioned from the care system.

Betty comes from a large family of eight children with a long history of drug and alcohol abuse, including solvents and ongoing domestic violence perpetrated by the parents. Betty had, as she describes, *"been in care all my life."* She has had numerous placements (she counted twenty) and spoke during the interview of *"bad foster placements."* She has spasmodic supervised access with her mother and some siblings.

Betty is currently living in a self-placed arrangement with people she described as “good carers,” however, she then stated that she has to move because the carers were unapproved by the Department.

She described herself as “black” but was unable to be culturally specific in what that actually meant for her. Betty’s level of intellectual impairment leave her at continual risk, in that she is unable to analyse a situation adequately enough to make an assessment as potentially risky. Hence Betty often finds herself in vulnerable and compromising situations. During the interview, Betty’s lack of self-esteem was evident and like the other girls interviewed in this same age group, she held body image issues, participated in binge drinking and continually dieted leading to a yo-yo effect on body weight.

Betty has been to “lots of different schools” and spoke about how much she hated changing schools and “wanting to stay in one spot.” Betty was interviewed as part of the data collection group as well as by herself at the day centre.

Naomi - Age 17, not in care

Naomi is seventeen years old, dark featured, slender Indigenous/Asian girl who has never been in care. She presented as attractive, outgoing, confident and softly spoken. She described her cultural heritage as “mixed”, then went on to explain that she was of “*Vanuatu, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island and Chinese descent*”. She was able to trace her lines of cultural descent back several generations. Her mother was born in the Torres Strait Islands, as was her maternal grandmother. Her grandfather was Chinese. Her father is from Vanuatu as was his mother. The paternal grandfather was of Anglo/Vanuatu descent.

Like other Indigenous girls in the research, Naomi identified strongly with her father’s culture in that, as Naomi explains, “*girls take their father’s genes.*” Naomi had never been in out of home care. She has two adult siblings and lives with her father and her dog. She described feeling very close to her family, which included the extended family on both sides, many of whom live physically close. Naomi’s mother died from an illness a couple of years before the interview.

Naomi had been to the same school all her life, has a close-knit set of friends and a boyfriend she had been seeing for over six months. She was presently working under the CDEP⁴¹ program and attending TAFE⁴². Naomi described her family life as being very stable and she attends many cultural and family events as part of the extended family. Naomi was interviewed by herself in a place she nominated.

Discussion

From the research findings it is clear from the research sample that the children not in care presented as being happy and far more connected to their extended family and community than their in care cohorts. As a result, they were able to deal with grief and loss, divorce and separation and were much less likely to be involved in risk taking behaviours, suffer depression and be disconnected from the education system. Of the young people in the sample, 50% (10) had parents who were divorced or separated and a majority (7) of this group were in out of home care. Five of the thirteen in care were in long-term out of home care with three of these living with a relative carer. All thirteen young people in out of home care came from nuclear families that were no longer intact. As a consequence these young people have lost contact with some family members, with three having little to no contact with their mother. All three were male. Ten had no contact with their father and four of these wanted to disown their family name. All of these four children were in out of home care and they cited the main perpetrator of abuse as having been their father.

Departmental files indicate that reasons for the loss of contact with fathers included external factors such as:

- father was the abuser so no contact was allowed;
- there has never been contact;
- father displays inconsistency in contact;
- being deceased, as well as the young person choosing not to have contact.

41 CDEP- Community Development Employment Program

42 TAFE- Technical and Further Education College

Reasons for loss of contact with their mother included:

- mother being unavailable or highly mobile;
- deceased;
- doesn't want the child or to have contact and being unable to care for the child.

Of the types of abuse suffered by the young people in out of home care that were interviewed, 100% had suffered some level of psychological abuse with 83% also suffering neglect, 66% domestic and family violence, 33% child sexual assault and 16% had been victims of severe, long-term sexual and physical abuse. In addition, the children in out of home care had all experienced the trauma of removal into care, which can also have an impact on their sense of identity (Sakinah et.al.,1994, p. 125).

A significant number of the interviewees that were in care (8), had mothers who had a diagnosed mental illness or an intellectual impairment. Seven had a parent/s who had drug or alcohol abuse issues.

For Herman the survivors of prolonged abuse develop characteristic personality changes, including deformations of relatedness and identity, and survivors of childhood abuse are particularly vulnerable to repeated harm, both self-inflicted and at the hands of others. Herman proposes a new syndrome diagnosis of 'Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder', and that 'responses to trauma are best understood as a spectrum of conditions rather than a single disorder' (1992, p. 119).

When reading the narratives above, it is clear that grief and loss is a reoccurring theme in the lives of children in care. Six of the young people had experienced the death of a parent, two of these were not in care. For the young people not in care they were able to articulate that a supportive parent and step parent, along with physical stability and a sense of community were important to their healing process. For those young people in care, grief and loss can occur on many levels which include; being taken into care, the loss of familial contact, displacement into a new physical area, loss of pets, loss of possessions, loss of contact with school friends and separation from siblings.

All of the children in care who had also experienced a major loss such as the death of a parent, spoke of still grappling with the effects of the loss, which suggests that they do not have the same level of support mechanisms as those not in care. Eight of the young people in care also come from families who have suffered inter-generational involvement with the welfare system. Lara, Andrew, Beth and Mary have also experienced separation or divorce of a long-term foster care relationship.

Seven of the young people in care had experienced repeated reunification attempts with their parents. This is in line with Departmental policy and legislation whereby it is acknowledged that it is in the '*best interest of the child*' if reunification can occur. The flip side of this is that children can '*drift in care*', in that a number of concurrent short-term (up to two years) orders are taken as case management goals centre around reunification.

For young people like Tony, Tom and Abbey, this has meant continued or escalated abuse upon their return home each time, along with the impact of a number of removals by the Department. For some young people, this has meant six years or more of short-term orders with little attention being paid to permanency planning.

The complexity displayed in the narratives of the lives of young people like Tracey, Mary, Tony, Tom, Beth, Kim, Ryan, Betty, Abbey and Dan can be considered much the norm for young people in out of home care generally. There are many similarities in types of coping mechanisms utilised by these young people such as, violent and risk taking behaviours, absconding, feelings of detachment, inattention and depression. These behaviours were present in children as young as seven in the research.

For some, the lack of appropriate placement options may have helped to exacerbate the situation.⁴³ Generally, lack of service choice and a skills shortage, particularly with regards to therapeutic services for children and young people in regional and remote areas of Australia, is an ongoing issue.

43 At the time of writing, placement options were limited to home-based foster care and placement within a wrap-around service model. This model was a very expensive option that involved six-monthly submissions by case managers to upper-management. No residential units were available.

Due to this systemic disadvantage, coupled with high caseloads for child protection workers, many young people like Kim and Dan become ‘risk managed’ within the system. This often equates to checking at different times (if the young person’s whereabouts is known), if the young person is safe, as workers have few available resource and legislative options in these cases.

There is also an over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the Juvenile Justice system. Tony, Tom and Dan all had siblings who had varying degrees of involvement including incarceration. ‘Nationally in 2006, fifty-four percent of all young people incarcerated were Indigenous’ (Australian Bureau Statistics, 2004), and ‘Indigenous youth are twenty-six times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous’ (Veld & Taylor, 2005).

Research by Dawes suggests that for a large number of Indigenous young people in his regional Queensland study, the greatest risk to reoffending is their home environment. *‘Fifty-two percent of interviewees stated that they preferred to stay in detention because they felt physically safe’*, and *‘twenty-two percent of the cohort identified their home environment as posing the greatest risk in terms of experiencing and/or witnessing physical violence as well as being victims of sexual abuse’* (Dawes, 2007).

Having detailed and analysed the research participants’ profiles and vicissitudes of life, it is time now in the next chapter to explore and thematically analyse the interviews with a particular emphasis on identity, culture and family, along with what the young people themselves considered to be important.

Chapter Six

What Children and Young People Had to Say

“Culture, it doesn’t mean anything. I don’t consider myself Aboriginal. To me Australia is just a country I was born in...I really don’t care where I come from.” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“My father and my mother taught me about my culture. I’d normally talk to those two about where my background is and how it’s done and what our culture means to... well, actually my family. So yeah, I got all that from them.” (Naomi, 17, Indigenous, not in care)

As highlighted by the two quotes above, the first made by a girl in care and the second made by a girl of similar age who was not in care, there were stark differences in the responses made. This chapter seeks to explore via thematic analysis the comments made by the children in relation to identity, culture, family and community connections, self-image, self-esteem and levels of trust along with what the children themselves spontaneously added as being important to them. Of the twenty children involved in the study, seventeen elected to participate in an in-depth interview as outlined in Chapter Four.

Identity

Children and young people in the research were asked if they knew what identity meant. They were also asked questions in order to ascertain if they had an understanding of the concept as it applied to them, if not the actual word. Six of the respondents knew what the word meant and seven displayed some level of identity confusion. All of the children who knew the word “identity” were over eleven years of age.

Identity confusion or having no sense of “who am I?” can be the lot of children and young people taken into care at a young age yet ‘identity is vital to their sense of self worth’ (Queensland Government, 2003, p. 63).

Identity confusion was assessed by analysing contradictions during the interview and being unable to answer any of the questions on identity, family and culture. For those seven young people who did display identity confusion five were female, two were Indigenous, four were Indigenous/Anglo and one was Chinese. All were in out of home care.

When the children and young people were asked “*Who are you?*” a number of respondents 30%(6), included their name and age, with all but one respondent being girls under the age of eleven. Among these six, physical features such as age, height, weight, skin, eye and hair colour were also highlighted, mainly by Indigenous respondents. Typical of these responses:

“I’d say my name, I’ve got coloured skin, I’ve got long hair and I’m quite big for my age”
(Summer, 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

“I’m brown, I’m nine years old, I’m in grade four and I like art.” (Abbey, 8, Indigenous, in care)

Only two boys added gender as part of their identity description.

“I’m brown, I’m a ten year old boy and I’m in grade four.” (Tony, 10, Indigenous, in care)

and;

“I’m fifteen years old, Chinese boy living in Australia.” (Ryan, 15, non-Indigenous, in care)

For one ten year old girl in out of home care, the trauma of removal was evident in her reply:

“I’d say my name, my age.... I would not tell them where I lived because otherwise they might come and find me and take me away.” (Alice, 10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Of interest here is that this child has had a stable placement since her removal as a baby, yet still she seems to display a level of fear and mistrust.

Of note is that not one child interviewed added being in foster care as part of their sense-of-self descriptor.

Some of the young people over the age of eleven were able to provide more in-depth responses:

“Identity is who you are, where you belong, what you are part of, who you think you are and not about who other people think you are.” (Summer, 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

“Identity it’s like your inner people...mine is mean and green! Sometimes I mistreat people and I like say things that are pretty hurtful and sometimes they just tell me if I’m being mean or something. So that’s why I am mean and green, because my personal colour is green.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

These two girls of similar age make an interesting comparison, the first echoing belonging and self-confidence, the second easily taking on other’s perceived perceptions of her.

Evident in the responses about identity was the contrast across the board between those responses made by children in care to those not in care. Below are five more examples:

“I would say, who are you? Why do you want to know me?” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“I would say...I’m myself? I’m from Vanuatu, and I’m part T.I. and I’m a very nice person! I’m interesting to talk to.” (Naomi, 17, Indigenous, not in care)

“I would say I’m very happy and very kind to other people. Someone who is not always perfect but tries their best. I think I’m quite sharing when it comes to other people.” (Summer, 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

“Identity is who you are, your culture, family and totem.” (Nelly, 16, Indigenous, not in care)

Dan responded by stating *“I don’t know.”* (14, Indigenous, in care)

The responses made by Beth and Dan was fairly typical of the responses made by the other children in care interviewed. All of the statements above, were made by young people over the age of thirteen years (adolescence) which, according to developmental identity theory, is the age range in which identity is attained via separation and individuation. However, the young Indigenous people in this research who were not in care, all spoke of family and cultural connection as being intrinsic to their sense of identity.

Culture

Of the 20% who cited culture as part of their identity, none were in out of home care and all but one was female. For three older Indigenous girls not in care, culture was indelibly linked to their sense of identity as evidenced by the inclusion of culture in their initial response. There was a sense of pride in these responses for example:

“I’m proud to belong to my culture!” (Nelly, 16, Indigenous, not in care)

“I just say I’m multi-culture.” (Kate, 11, Indigenous, not in care)

“I just say I come from half England and half Africa and that the dark hair and dark skin colour are Africa.” (Summer, 13, Non-Indigenous, not in care)

Even the youngest participant who was not in care could articulate, in part what culture his family was from:

“Mum comes from Holland.” (Robby, 5, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Of interest here, is that he was unable to articulate what country his dad was from (his father is Anglo Australian). Robby’s response echoes the response of older children in the research who viewed the dominant Anglo Australian culture as “*just is*”, or rather, as normality in opposition to the cultural other. Robby has regular contact with both set of grandparents and has visited Holland a number of times.

It appears that physical appearance has some influence upon cultural identification.

Physical difference and cultural other were clearly articulated. Two siblings Kate and Kirsty for example, when asked to introduce themselves and who they were to the interviewer explained:

“Well I got different...I’ve got coloured skin, I’ve got long hair and I am quite big for my age.”
(Kate, 11, Indigenous, not in care)

and;

“I’ve got different coloured eyes...you (the interviewer) have brown eyes and I have really brown eyes.” (Kristy, 8, Indigenous, not in care)

Ryan (15, non-Indigenous, in care) spoke of feeling different:

“Back then when I first came to Australia I felt really different because I was Chinese.”

For many of the Indigenous/Anglo young people in out of home care, culture was indelibly linked to the abuser, thus to deny their Indigeneity could also be a means, on an intra-psychic level, of severing their relational link to the abuser. This was particularly so for the 30% of young people who wanted to change their family name and felt disconnected from their extended family. Family name and country are important aspects of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander cultural identification. In my observation, in Aboriginal culture it is standard practice to introduce oneself by stating your family name, clan name and name of the country you are from. To abandon the family name could perhaps also mean abandoning one’s sense of connection to one side of the extended family and culture. The quote below made by Tony is indicative of the depth of feeling this can arouse for children in out of home care.

“I want to get out of this family situation. Change my name, cos I hate my Dad...! I don’t want to live like my Dad! I don’t want to see his face!” (Tony, 10, Indigenous, in care)

The majority of the participants were from a combination of cultures hence the research tried to ascertain whether negotiating a multi-cultural identity was an issue for young people.

All of the multi-cultural girls not in out of home care spoke about being proud of being from different cultures, with girls from eight years to eighteen years being able to trace their cultures back through their family tree. Many were clear about their bloodline. Typical of the responses when asked if they ever felt they had to choose between cultures was one young woman's reply:

"Yeah, well I see myself more Vanuatu because girls normally take their father's genes, so I think I am more Vanuatu than Torres Strait. So yeah! Well I'm proud of who I am from the start I think." (Naomi, 17, Indigenous, not in care)

"Yeah, well I just got it from both sides (mum and dad), and I'm just like, I know where I fit in." (Nelly, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

Kate (11, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care) was also able to articulate the various cultures within her family:

"There's my Grandad- he's Chinese and South Sea Islander, My Mum's Dad he was Scottish, my Dad he's Aboriginal. We get to know a lot about culture from Mum and Dad but also from other people like Grandma and Aunty."

Naomi (17, Indigenous, not in care) described a situation at school when she was younger and she was asked to choose belonging to one culture:

"Umm, they were going what are you and where do you come from? And I was like oh I'm both and they said, you have to pick one out of that number. Yeah. And I said well I am Torres Strait oh I mean Vanuatu ...oh okay. So I was a bit dodgy for the both of them."

Naomi was asked the reason why she was asked to choose:

"Oh just like the people like who were in the school, whatever they were, they wanted me to sing the song of my culture."

What this perhaps demonstrates in Naomi's case is that at times all multi-cultural children may be asked to make such a decision.

For a number of children like Nelly, being from different cultures did not pose a threat to their sense of identity:

“So it’s (being multi-cultural) always been something that has just been accepted.” (16, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

For Summer, even though her Ghanaian culture is from the paternal side it is her Anglo mother who informs her and ensures this connection remains strong.

“Reading and hearing about me country (Ghana) is important to me.” (Summer 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Moreover, for children in out of home care the decision of culture is often made on their behalf, either as a consequence of child protection case management decisions, family dynamics or the enactment of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* (CMC, 2004).

It was the young people in out of home care however, who were unable to articulate what cultures they were from and said that they felt disconnected from any culture.

“No one has asked me what culture I am from. Mum taught me about it but I’ve forgotten because I’ve been away from her a long time and my Dad’s dead.” (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

and,

“My cultural group is black.” (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care) Betty was unable to articulate what that meant for her⁴⁴.

Beth described her reaction when her mother informed her of her Aboriginality the year before on an access visit.

⁴⁴ A more recent dynamic is the influence of Afro-American culture as a consequence of mass media in particular the ghetto culture and music film clips. Even in remote areas of the Northern Territory, Elders have articulated their concern that the influence of mass media has further diluted their culture with children as young as five “sexy dancing” (Moss, Faulkner & Horwood, 2010).

“Last Easter...last Easter she said there was something she was going to tell me and she told me. But it doesn’t mean anything, I don’t consider myself Aboriginal. It was from my Mother’s, Grandfather’s side. My Grandma is dead and my grandpa is dead.” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

One participant made the following statement about his culture:

“Umm, well I’m not quite sure because I don’t really care really because I moved from Chinese culture. Moved here and I see the difference between Australian and Chinese. To me (emphasis upon me) to me, it’s, it’s just nothing really big really, because the way I live, is just the way I live.”(Ryan, 15, non-Indigenous, in care)

He then proceeded to talk of missing the big Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year.

Ryan was asked how he would describe his way of life in Australia:

“Just normal, casual people. Australian culture basically it’s just like, you know, do whatever you want! I don’t mind missing it (Chinese culture) because I am in Australia.” (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

It appears that Ryan feels the need to give up his Chinese cultural heritage in order to ‘fit in’ in order to gain the benefits he sees as being intrinsic to Australian/Anglo culture.

Tony, who lives with his relative carer could easily articulate what cultures he was from:

“Yep! I’m half South Sea and half Aboriginal...I know from Nan’s sisters and brothers and my mother’s sisters and brothers. Yeah! Cos they are all South Sea! But I don’t get to see them much.” (10, Indigenous, in care)

He then talked excitedly of a planned trip to South Sea Island at the end of the year when he will see these relatives again.

When asked about Australian culture it was very clear that the dominant culture is all pervasive. For many of the young people it, “*just is*” or it is “*the place that you live in.*” From the sample, children as young as seven and eight had a sense of the cultural ‘other’. As one child stated,

“Culture is about someone from a different place.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Lara and Andrew the concept of cultural ‘other’ was evidenced.

“Culture to me is someone from a different place than me. If I went over to Asia or something I would say I’m from Australia. They aren’t going to understand my culture, which is just basically the Australian way. That’s rough, tough and easy going. If there’s a problem we will fix it. Australians have a lot of guts in them and when it comes to national sport we usually come first.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

and,

“I reckon culture is like nature that you are use to and that you live in. Take Vanuatu, like they have a totally different culture and lifestyle to me. Like at the beach, they might swim in sand but here we swim in the sea and like we swim for hours in the sea and they might just play in sand for like hours....and the food, they might like eat other cultures like bugs and all that and I eat McDonald’s.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Evident in this research is the link between extended family and gaining cultural knowledge in that all of the children not in care could articulate their culture, along with who in their extended family plays a role in providing this link to culture, which they viewed as being central to their identity. For children not in care, negotiating and belonging to several different cultural groups was not an issue. The importance of physical features to their sense of cultural belonging was also evidenced. It is interesting to surmise if complete denial of their Aboriginality for Tracey and Mary would have occurred had their Aboriginality had been more physically evident.

Trust

Five (25%) young people talked about having an issue with trust; all of these were in out of home care and Indigenous or Indigenous/Anglo. For those of the five who did not refer directly to trust they did mention wanting to run away and not needing or feeling unable to confide in anyone as the following quotes display:

“When I feel sad I keep it to myself, keep it inside myself cos I just won’t tell anyone and I feel like running away.” (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

and,

“I’d rather not trust anyone, somebody could go behind your back...you really can’t trust anyone.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

and,

“I would just take my fishing rod, I am happy just by myself, I don’t want anyone.” (Dan, 14, Indigenous, in care)

One respondent spoke at length about trust issues with her mother.

“I’d say I’m confused about Mum. Even though she once put me into care or my Dad’s sister did. She said she wanted the best for me but.... the only person I can really believe in is myself, I can’t really believe in anyone else. I should be able to get the truth. That’s why I am confused because some things I ask Mum, like why I came into care and she would say it doesn’t matter or she would somehow get out of it and then she asks me why I am upset and then I tell her and then she would like not tell me the truth. It took her two years to tell me the truth and she just finished at the beginning of this year, so I feel that there is more to it than that. I just got to keep asking for the truth.” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care).

All of the children who spoke of not being able to trust were disconnected from their extended families and culture. They had learnt at an early age that they could not trust their parents and this mistrust was carried through into their other relationships, which, can lead to isolation and a heightened sense of self-reliance.

It is interesting to note, that no mention was made by the children in terms of trusting their CSSO, given that the Department is responsible for the care and protection of these children. Longitudinally, it would be interesting to see how this lack of trust plays itself out in future adult relationships.

Loss and Grief

The knock on affect of health issues and poverty plaguing the Indigenous population throughout Australia was evidenced in the research, with all of the Indigenous and Indigenous/Anglo participants having relatives who have died.

Loss and grief was evident in the interviews, which was not surprising when we consider that in only four cases, respondents came from intact families. Of the seven children who had a deceased parent six participated in an interview. Of this six, three were in out of home care. Of the three who were not in care, two had lost their father but spoke of having a close relationship with their step father. One respondent in this group had lost her mother but spoke of her close relationship with her father and extended family. The other three children in this cohort who were in care, also made reference to their deceased parent during the interview. Abbey drew a family portrait referenced from her only family photo of *“when Dad was alive”*; she was five years old at the time. Abbey spoke at length about her birth father, who is now deceased, and identified strongly with him. She also expressed some ambivalence towards the siblings she is placed with. Abbey spoke of her one remaining adult sibling whom she likes but doesn’t get to see.

Mary made reference to her deceased mother when asked what things are special to her:

“My teddy-bears...me and Mum use to go shopping all the time and she would usually buy me something. She bought a teddy bear for me and she got one too...I have them both now. They are the same just different colours dark brown and light brown. There really nice and I have got them both!” (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

It is not surprising that some possessions take on the role of an attachment object. Mary, like so many children in care often loose important possessions as a result of removal into care, and in many cases, regular changes in their care situation, hence such losses can help to compound their sense of grief and loss.

Dan spoke about his father dying the year before from excessive alcohol misuse. Dan also spoke of his deceased brother along with another half-brother that wasn't on his family map because he doesn't know him.

Loss of extended family members also featured in the interviews.

Tony mentioned his grandparents:

"Guess where my Granddad is buried?...At his place! He made a house on his own with my Nan but then she died, She died in her sleep. I only got to see my Granddad and not my Nan and then... I only got to see my Granddad but he's dead. He had sugar [diabetes]." (10, Indigenous, in care)

In contrast another young person not in care mentioned the death of her grandfather citing him as an important influence in her cultural identity. She remembered fondly:

"My Torres Strait grandfather, I have known him since I was little, he would sing songs to me." (Nelly, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

Other forms of loss and grief were also evident in the interviews with children in care citing the loss of siblings, friends, pets, communities and important belongings. All of the children in care had experienced multiple forms of grief and loss as a consequence of both the vicissitudes of their family and coming into the care system.

"One of my brothers died and there was another brother that I never met." (Dan, 14, Indigenous, in care)

"Friends change all the time!" (Ryan, 14, non-Indigenous, in care)

The importance of extended family, friends, pets and belongings is further explored later in this chapter.

Family

All of the children not in out of home care expressed strong positive emotions towards their parents, with all in this cohort mentioning parents first when listing the people most important to them.

“I think a lot about my Mum...I think she is very kind and when I am horrible to her she is always nice back and she treats me the right way and I love her a lot.” (Summer, 13, non-Indigenous not in care)

A longitudinal American study found that adolescents who reported a ‘lower sense of connectedness to their families tend to engage in high risk-taking behaviours’ (cited in Brindis, Park, Paul, Burg, 2002, p. 6). This was evidenced in this research via Departmental files, information received from workers and the interviews, in that those young people most disconnected from their families and cultural communities displayed a much higher level of risk-taking behaviours, were disconnected from the school system and were more likely to display depressive and/or aggressive symptoms.

Sense of connection to family was assessed in several ways including; who the young person cited as being important to them, who they included in their family drawings and who they talked about during the interview regarding contact and wanting increased contact. Again siblings rated very highly with ten of the children feeling connected to siblings and those in out of home care all wanted increased contact with siblings. Of the two who did not consider siblings as important, one was not in care and was an only child and the other was in out of home care and had little to no contact from a young age.

Thirty-five percent of children in care felt disconnected from their extended family with many of the children in care saying they did not know or have contact with extended family.

In contrast, all of the Indigenous children not in out of home care included extended family as being important to them:

“When I say family I mean parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and aunties and stuff it is a very big family.” (Kate, 11, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

Many young people expressed emotions about their family of origin during the interviews. It was those young people in out of home care in the eight-fifteen year old age range that expressed high levels of ambivalence towards their mother and talked of feeling betrayed by one or both parents.

“Na! Never heard from him (dad) never, ever have.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“That Dad was missing never really affected me because I never knew him.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“Umm. From the first time I was born, I haven’t seen my real Mum, before. I was with my real Dad. My real Dad met my step-Mum. Then I ran away with my step-Mum to Australia away from my real Dad.” (Ryan, 15, non-Indigenous, in care)

“Craig is my Dad, (begins to cry) I haven’t seen Craig for 13 years.” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“Yeah. I’ve known Mum. I’ve seen her a few times but she just goes on about stuff and I’m like, whatever! As far as I’m concerned K and T (foster parents) are my two. All my brothers and sisters have different fathers. There’s also another son that’s a baby that was born last year...(of his mother) Babies just keep on coming!” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“I don’t know my Dad but I don’t get on well with Mum. I’ve never really liked her.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Tony’s response quoted earlier talked of belonging to his family as being in a “situation” he would like to see changed.

Beth spoke candidly about the arranged visits with her mum:

“If I missed a visit I wouldn’t make it up I would go the last Saturday of every month. I got to see Alice (her half-sister) on these visits. The CSO arranged it. They asked Mum (foster-mum) to do it.”

Mum said we can try it and we will see how it goes. I just didn't...I just...felt uncomfortable... I wasn't ready to see her... They made me talk to her...then it's still like if I was talking to her...she might open her arms and say "trust me" and I just can't....She asked me I said just keep things steady. I couldn't really tell her that I can't trust her and I was really young so....N (birth mother) asked for extra visits but I didn't want extra visits because I didn't trust her." (16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

This quote from Beth highlights that in many cases sibling contact is tied up with parental contact. There also seems to have been a lack of consultation by the Department with Beth about the visits including frequency and types. Beth's ambivalence towards her mother has also resulted in less contact with her half-siblings.

Alice also talked about the visits:

"I see N once a month for an hour. I see D (half-brother) he's eventually walking and that's about it....I haven't seen any other people (extended family) yet." (10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

"When I lived with Mum I always got to see my cousins. I go to a white carer for respite. I would prefer to go to family because it makes me happy when I see them. That's my family, there is my older brother and sisters that my Dad had. I don't get to see them." (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Abbey described being in different family or kinship placements but did not know why she had been moved. She lives in her current placement with her two siblings and their maternal aunt and family. Abbey was disconnected from her culture and could not articulate which culture she was from, even when prompted by the Family Support Worker during the interview. The aunt remains disconnected from her extended family and community.

Abbey was able to articulate from the age of five and six whom she wanted contact with and what that contact needed to look like in order for her to feel safe (e.g. requesting no contact with her mother). It appears from Abbey's story, that there were very few occasions when she was consulted or even told when and why decisions were made on her behalf.

Abbey also spoke of contact with her step father B:

“I call both my real dad and T, Dad. I want to see him more. Last time I got to see him was Christmas. There was us kids, Mum, T and H (the CSSO). He (T) is part of the family but I only get to see him at Christmas.” (10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“I’ve got a half-brother and half-sister which is my real Dad’s and step Mum’s. I don’t see them, I don’t make contact with any of them. I don’t see any relatives or step relatives. All I see is foster carer’s family.” (Ryan, 15, non-Indigenous in care)

“I want to visit every Thursday with mainly my brothers and sisters and Mum and get phone contact with my older brother.” (Tony, 10, Indigenous, in care)

These quotes highlight the importance children place on having regular contact with extended family and siblings. Of concern is the apparent tendency of some Departmental staff to view contact as being necessary with only the parents, and that sibling contact is being linked to parental contact visits. As evidenced in this research, there are occasions when children would like to spend time only with their siblings and undoubtedly there would also be times when one-on-one visits with parents or extended family is important in terms of the child’s wellbeing. As was the case for a number of children in this research, when access visit/s with a parent/s was postponed or ceased for whatever reason it also meant that sibling contact, if it was occurring also did not occur. Apparent in the research was the capacity of even the younger children to be able to clearly articulate who they wanted to see more of and how often they wanted to have contact. A number of the children in the research who were in care were estranged from their extended family. Also of concern is that Department files demonstrated the lack of exploration into extended family placement and respite options.

What is important to you?

In order to ascertain what was important to the younger participants they were asked to consider:

“Say you had to go to an Island to live and you had to leave everything behind except the things and people you most want with you. Who and what would you choose to take?”

All of the children asked provided a response. As mentioned above, siblings rated very highly (75%) across the board as being important.

Six respondents cited friends as being very important with all but one being Indigenous or Indigenous/Anglo and in out of home care. All of the respondents who were not in care cited family as being more important to them than friends. Five year old Robby interestingly omitted his one-year old baby brother from his important people list:

“Daddy, Mummy, E (sister) (doesn’t mention baby brother).” (5, non-Indigenous, not in care)

This was in direct contrast to those children in care who more often cited friends. To Doyle, relationships with same age peers, siblings, adults outside the abusive environment, organisational and religious groups, pets and toys can function as life-lines for children who have a history of or who are currently victims of child maltreatment (cited in Iwaniec, et.al., 2006, p. 79).

When asked who would be the most important people for her, Abbey cited her friends:

“Mandy and Carol I would take with me. I wouldn’t take my family (shaking head) Hell no!” (8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

She then went on to talk of her best friend Mandy with whom she has formed a level of trust:

“I would talk to Mandy (if I feel sad) She’s a good friend, we don’t dob.” (8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Although Andrew was highly attached to his foster family as evidence both in his responses and his artwork, he also felt that his friends were very important.

“I’ve got lots of friends but my favourite is Toby I’d take him with me on the island.” (14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Four children talked of the importance of their extended family to them, all of these children were Indigenous and not in care. Six children felt school was very important to them with all but one of this cohort being female and in care. This is not surprising when one considers the important role friends play in the lives of this cohort.

Ryan spoke of the effect of moving around on forming friendships.

“I made friends with an Australian kid and then left friends, friendship, friends, change all the time.” (15, non-Indigenous in care)

It was the five eight year olds that cited toys, as being important Robby is typical of this cohort:

My motorised truck, and my motorised car, cars, textas.” (5, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Seven children mentioned art as being something important to them with several mentioning it was one of the reasons they remained engaged at school.

“Art is really important to me because I can express a lot of my feelings and thoughts.” (Summer, 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

“I like school a lot because I get to do a lot of art.” (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Pets also featured particularly amongst girls, with girls in and not in out of home care providing similar responses to those in care. The loss of a pet as a consequence of family violence and family breakdown coupled with Departmental intervention can have a huge impact on an already traumatised child, as can the violence towards family pets when living with domestic violence as explored earlier:

“The only important things are myself, my clothes and ... my pups. My pups are important. I have four!” (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“My puppy dog. He was only little and he was still a puppy and if he’d lived he would have been three.” (Kristy, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

“The most important thing to me is my dog K. He’s in quarantine.” (Summer, 13, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Mary spoke of the loss of pets as a consequence of moving south with her foster parent:

“We are taking the little dog with us but leaving our cat behind because the cat isn’t use to the city and it might get run over. I love cats!” (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Mary then spoke at length of all the animals on their acreage that they were leaving behind as she listed them:

“...horses, chickens, dogs and a cat.”

Finding work and earning money was mentioned by a number of the older respondents:

“I worked in the school holidays. I worked in a fish and chip shop. I bought these already (points to the shoes on his feet). I can only work in the holidays and if I’m suspended at school.” (Dan, 14, Indigenous, in care)

Dan then went on to discuss getting suspended a number of times.

For Andrew, *“Maybe I might kick off to the coal mines for a few years to make some money and then I can start travelling like Dad (foster). I heard these days you can get a lot of money in mines because of new rules and everything. R my brother (foster) earns two grand a week in the mines so he’s pretty lucky but he reckons it’s not enough. I want to be like my brother (foster), he gets to tell people what to do. I’ve got a few other ideas; I want to do archeological digs. I know a lot about them ...that’s the main one I want to do.”* (14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Ryan being in Australia was very important to his sense of well being:

“I don’t really miss Hong Kong. I’m really happy in Australia to be honest Australia is better than Hong Kong. Wider spaces. It’s better just the whole environment thing is better than in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is very crowded and the houses are very small. Yep, so it’s quite different, it’s a different feeling.” (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

Andrew mentioned living in a nice house as part of his identity descriptor. He also drew his old family (foster) home, which may be related to a happier time prior to his foster carer’s divorce.

In terms of other responses, religion, food (cultural) and ancestors were also mentioned by older girls not in care as being important.

“Important things to me are Bible, food, Mum, family like brothers, sisters, grandmothers, mother’s brothers and sisters, my Torres Strait grandfather.” (Nelly, 16, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Foster Care

A total of six of the eleven children in care expressed feeling connected to their foster parents. Three were male and three were female with all but two, Tony and Ryan, who is Chinese (HK) being Indigenous/Anglo, fair complexioned and living with Anglo non-familial carers.

Of the children in out of home care, those children and young people who were most scathing of foster carers during the interview, were those who had experienced the most placement changes. Betty for example (on her count) had lived in twenty placements;

“They (foster children) don’t like the carers because the carers are sometimes rude and don’t look after the kids and they sometimes lie. I have been in foster homes, they lie, they steal, they talk about you behind your back....I hate carers.” (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Not surprisingly it was those children who had remained in stable placements for the majority of their time in care who identified most strongly with their foster family, often calling the foster parents Mum and Dad.

“Yeah, I want to be like Dad (foster dad), I want to travel the world like he did.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Beth mentioned finding some of her family history in a box her estranged father gave to his mother to give to her:

“I mean, when I was thirteen something happened. I asked questions at thirteen and then fourteen. When I was thirteen I had a box with her (mother’s) stuff, she doesn’t know I have it. When she left Dad, she left it behind and my Aunt gave it to her mum (Beth’s grandmother) for me to keep. There was photos of when she (grandmother) was little and of when Mum was in foster care, stuff from the Department. Her grandmother was in foster care so her background is nearly the same as mine. But she was in foster care with her grandma. And she had the same foster carer all along.” (16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

This example also raises the issue of intergenerational foster care and its effect on identity, as this young person articulated deep-seated identity issues, felt unable to trust and had a history of depression. This quote also highlights the impact of the Stolen Generation, Indigenous health outcomes, poverty and the psycho-social consequences of Indigenous history in that it is often left to the same grandparents or strong aunties and uncles to take care of a number of young family members when their own parents were unable and/or unwilling to do so. That this pool of people is diminishing has an impact upon possible placement options.

Ryan spoke of the time he first came into the care system:

“I got put into foster care because I had too many arguments with my parents. So I got moved back (home) after a month. Then we moved up here and she (step mum) starts again and so I ran away. Then I moved in with a foster parent and after that I moved to another foster carer. After that I moved to another one because of the foster carer’s contract or something it’s like a twenty-eight day thing.” (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

For Ryan the current fostering experience has been positive:

“Before I was a parent hater, you know? I thought before I was in foster care I just hated parents, I just wanted to get on with my life and all that and I used to run away from home and go to my friends’ place. When the foster carers came and looked after me, it was great!” (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

Ryan’s situation differed from that of the other children interviewed in that he was fourteen when he came into care and it was a decision he felt he had made for himself, which contrasts greatly with all of the other children interviewed who had entered the system at an early age and had experienced multiple placements. Of interest however, is that Ryan had been in five different foster care situations in the space of just over a year.

All children in out of home care have to also grapple with finding their place within the foster family system, often needing to negotiate relationships with their foster carer’s own children.

“I do feel sad sometimes, like the problems with my older (foster) brother. I feel bad but usually I have to forgive him because families are the most important thing you will ever have in life, so why not just enjoy them? If my foster brother says something bad to me I hold it in, I don’t forget about it but he usually thinks I do but if it’s something like bullying, like what he does.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Alice spoke of constant arguments with her foster-brother when looking at the yelling card:

“Yelling at D. It (yelling) happens a lot. He’s always annoying. I yell at D and he yells back at me. It happens a lot!” (10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

A number of interviews also highlighted the changing dynamics of foster families, which can add to the complexity of the lives of children in out of home care. Of interest, is that all four children who have been in relatively stable, non-kinship foster placements, had also had to deal with separation and divorce within their foster families and the ongoing impact of this on their lives. These children also had to deal with a change in school and often an entirely different location. Such circumstances can result in yet another loss for the child in out of home care, which can also lead to heightened feelings of abandonment and anger.

Such family disruptions have a profound impact upon the entire family system. For example as a consequence of the foster carer’s divorce, Lara was having to renegotiate her relationship with her older foster sister who was twenty years old and charged with caring for Lara and Andrew whilst the foster father worked away during the week. This arrangement has led to ongoing arguments, so much so the foster sister spoke to the researcher of plotting to arrange for Lara to stay with her estranged foster mother.

Mary continued to live with her foster mother throughout what continues to be a fairly acrimonious separation with the foster father. During the interview she stated that she:

“Got on OK with him because he was away for four days at a time for work and when he was home they kept out of his way because he was grouchy and that she did not miss him.”

She talked of the time he was so “cranky” he “nearly knocked someone out.” (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Having lived with domestic violence for most of her life, it is likely that Mary downplays the level of violence she has witnessed in this care situation. It has been my experience in my work with children such as Mary, who have witnessed extreme domestic violence over a long period of time from an early age, that domestic violence becomes normalised and violent behaviours become minimalised.

Naomi who was a CDEP worker in a foster care agency felt strongly about children being placed with non-family members:

“Well I think that’s wrong! (Heavy emphasis placed upon the word wrong). I definitely think that’s wrong and I, I disagree with the people, I reckon they should be placed with family they feel comfortable with. I reckon that’s important for the Indigenous kids, indigenous kids here, I mean because if they get put into a white peoples’ home...! I mean they’ll, I know I’d feel uncomfortable if I was a kid in care and I got placed in a white peoples home and it’s not my own culture, like getting placed in a black peoples home because it’s two different things I think!”
(17, Indigenous, not in care)

The children’s exploration into their foster care situation in this research has highlighted a number of issues that could benefit from further research. For a number of children in the research who were considered by the Department to be in stable placements, relationship difficulties, separation and divorce within the foster care relationship have had adverse effects upon the foster children in their care, as was the case for Andrew, Beth and Lara. As evidenced in other research (Thorpe et.al., 2006) and inquiries (CMC, 2004) the foster carer’s relationship with the Department is often fraught with tension, which may inhibit some foster carers from informing the Department should they be experiencing difficulties in their personal life that could impact upon the child/ren in their care.

In Mary’s case, during the interview she alluded to possible domestic violence perpetrated by her foster father prior to the permanent separation of the foster parents. Highlighted here is the difficulty of screening for domestic violence tendencies during the foster care assessment process. In a number of states and territories in Australia, including Queensland and the Northern Territory, several routine checks occur as part of the assessment process. One such check is a criminal history check.

Generally, a person does not acquire a criminal record for domestic violence unless there is a domestic and family violence order in place that has been breached and a conviction has occurred. This system is further complicated by the fact that police departments are state run, with each jurisdiction abiding by its own Act, which are not identical across jurisdictions. Information flow between jurisdictions can also prove clumsy at best, in that there is no centralised body that holds information. State departments such as the Department of Child Safety have to firstly be aware that the foster care applicant has lived interstate and then request the information state by state as required.

Theoretically this could mean that a person could have several domestic violence orders against them in several different states but unless these orders have been breached, no information regarding domestic violence is provided. As a consequence of the Crime and Misconduct Inquiry into foster care in Queensland, the Blue Card system was implemented ensuring all people who work with children, including foster carers, attain a current criminal history and child protection check, however, the anomaly outlined above still exists within this new system which potentially puts foster children at risk.

The Department of Child Safety

Departmental workers continually make decision on the child's behalf that have a profound impact upon their lives such as changes in; CSSO and CSO, visit schedules, schools, access to services and attendance at recreational and educational excursions, along with access to extended family and friends.

The number of changes in CSO is also relevant, certainly in terms of consistency, case planning and ultimately the outcomes for children in out of home care. Caseworker case allocation can also be effected by restructures. It was often difficult to ascertain the actual number of caseworkers per child by reviewing Departmental files as evidenced by the Reconnect Audit undertaken in 2003 (Moss). The children themselves were also asked how many CSO's they have had. Nine children had six or more CSO's, which, is considerable if one is to consider the age of some of the respondents. Six of the children could not cite the actual number with the typical response being that there was *"too many to count."*

The children were rarely given reasons for these changes, which alluded to systemic issues resulting in inadequate case handover between CSO's. Reasons for changing CSO's are varied. Some are systemic as a result of the child moving through the system in a staged approach from assessment through to long-term care⁴⁵.

Staff recruitment and retention along with the number of times the child re-enters the system as a result of failed reunification attempts also have an impact.

"I don't know how many FSOs (CSO's) we have had. Lots! Sometimes they go, I'm not working with you anymore. They go out of business and then they go back into the business and they find themselves with the same families." (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Several young people in care spoke of the lack of communication with their CSO along with lack of information as to why major decisions had been made, such as placement changes, why they had been brought into care, why they cannot return home and why they have to change schools.

"Not really happy with the Department...there's not enough people there. They are not around to listen to what I want. My sister needs help from them but they don't do nothing...she lives on the streets sniffing paint." (Dan, 14, Indigenous in care)

"I have had three carers. We were first with Aunty P and we didn't know why we couldn't stay there." (Tony, 10, Indigenous, in care)

Dan spoke of having visited his parents and knowing he cannot return but having no understanding as to why this should be so.

Some of the respondents expressed strong views about the Department:

"I hate the Department!" (Kim, 17, Anglo, in care)

⁴⁵ At the time of writing it was procedure for a 'case' to be transferred from team to team within a child protection office dependant upon the stage of the 'case'. The Intake and Assessment Team were responsible for all intakes and assessing allegations of abuse. Once a child comes into care and a Child Protection Order is in place the 'case' then gets transferred to the Short-Term (CP orders) Team, who then try to work with the family in order to address the child protection concerns in order for reunification to occur. Once a child is in the system for a longer term and a long-term order is taken out, the case gets transferred to the Long-Term Team.

"I don't like the Department because they don't look after kids properly...they just put kids in homes and the kids don't like it." (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Beth went on to say that she and Alice actually did not have a designated CSO at the moment:

"They (the Department) said that they can't find anyone. We don't have any contact with the Department. The Team Leader said that she didn't have anyone for us. Which is all right for me but she virtually can't find anyone, I mean we should be able to have someone at the Department until we are eighteen years old but I mean we haven't really had much contact with the Department, only for plane tickets and stuff. The only time Mum (foster) thought there might be contact with the Department was to get the order revoked. Also cause Bryan (adopted thirteen year old brother) needs medication for ADHD. Then she had contact cause of Bryan nearly every week Bryan went here there and everywhere." (16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Beth goes on to say:

"They (the Department) should listen to young people. Hear what they have to say. Don't dwell on the past. They should give children and teenagers a chance to talk and to ask them what they think and if they are safe. Yep...Children should have the right to talk and be free with what happens in the Department and their future and feel safe." (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

"I don't really have much contact with the people at the Department? I can't remember" (Alice, 10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

When the young people were asked if they could change anything with the Department what would it be, children as young as six were able to articulate clearly their preferences.

"They should make my visits every Thursday with mainly my brothers, sisters and mother and they should arrange phone contact with my brother." (Tony, 10, Indigenous, in care)

Interestingly Tony also spoke of family visits being cancelled without him knowing why, which also meant much longer periods between family contacts which were already somewhat irregular. Departmental files indicate that at times his parents had gone ‘walkabout’ but why other contact visits were cancelled was not indicated. Abbey was also able to articulate to her CSSO that she did not want increased contact with her mother, that visits remain supervised and that she did not like it when her mother phoned because she was usually drunk and abusive.

This highlights the importance of CSSOs in that these employees are often more stable in their employment in terms of retention, compared with the CSOs. Children do form valuable relationships with these workers when given the chance. However, as evidenced in this research, systemic and staffing issues can inhibit continuous engagement with the same children.

“I’d change my visits, have more visits with my sister.” (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“I’d spend less time with Mum and make it more fun. We just go and stay in a hotel somewhere half the time we get bored.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“They could let me do respite with family not white carers. Let me see P (Mum’s long-term partner) and let me see my other family more.” (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

“Being on time. They make me wait in the office (at school) to be picked up. I can’t help but notice that she (CSO) is always late.” (Mary, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Ryan:

“I would change like maybe they (the Department) could help the foster carers pay for fees like sports and camping and things like that you need. It would be very nice. You know I don’t really want them to spend too much on me. I feel guilty sometimes when I ask for stuff. There is also a rule where you have to like get permission for something like going on a camp. The foster carer couldn’t do anything cos they needed the Department’s signature. I know they are busy but it can take a week or two just to sign a name and give it back to me and by the time its back it’s really hard because it’s too late. So I wish they would speed it up and give privileges to the carers.” (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

The lack of services available specifically for children in rural and remote areas is also an issue. Beth talked about her own counselling experience:

“I was getting counselling every week when I was miserable and upset but she hasn’t been for two months because she has too many other clients. It is good when I can talk through things that I thought were my fault. The end of last year I was like...really miserable. Last year the counsellor was there like every week and she like helped me through everything. ...It’s hard for me. She has other cases on her hands. ...It was good but then she got more cases and then she got really sick and she couldn’t come to see us.” (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

As a worker in both child counselling and child protection in several states of Australia, I am acutely aware of the lack of expertise and service provision in areas outside of the major capital cities in Child Trauma Counselling. Beth lived in a city yet she too was experiencing access issues. Beth’s interview also highlights the issues of attraction and retention of staff in this profession, along with the impact of burn-out and vicarious trauma.

Andrew spoke of how valuable counselling had been to him:

“We go and see R the counsellor every Tuesday. If I’ve got a problem all I have to do is just tell her and she’ll sort it out, she also has contact with my CSO and stuff.” (14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Consistency and availability can also become an issue as evidenced by Mary and Tracey, who had been to several counsellors over a number of years and now refuses to access any counselling service. The counselling relationship is built on trust. With a child who has suffered abuse, parental trust has been severed, hence the counselling relationship can provide an opportunity for a child to learn to trust an adult. The therapy space can also provide a safe environment where the child can enjoy agency and control over the process. When these therapeutic relationships are severed prematurely by the therapist, the child may feel this new found sense of trust is misplaced and inhibit trust from forming in future relationships. Mary and Tracey had this occur on numerous occasions mainly due to staff retention in the industry.

Both Betty and Dan spoke of resisting the system to get what they want. Dan, by trying to get suspended from school so he could work to earn money and Betty, by arranging her own family contact visits.

“Actually I have to be supervised (on family visits) but I can just go and do it!” (17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

This in itself is of concern considering Betty was hurt on one of these recent visits, however she will soon be eighteen years old and no longer in care.

Despite numerous client feedback studies by organisations such as CREATE, along with more localised studies as outlined in Chapter Three of this research, it appears that children and young people are not being included in major decisions that affect their lives. The time-lapse as described by Ryan regarding Departmental approval for something as simple as a school excursion and sports, and the frustration outlined by Mary in having to continually wait outside of the school Principals office for the CSO, inadvertently sets these children apart from the other children in the school system. This also highlights the lack of power and control of these children to effect any changes in their lives, even for something as seemingly simple as negotiating a location or time change for pick up by their caseworker.

School

Changing schools can be traumatic for many young people but more so children in out of home care, who may experience school as the only consistency in their life. Children in care often have to endure a number of school changes for a variety of reasons.

Twenty percent of the girls named school as being important socially to them, in contrast to only two percent of boys. However, Summer, who was not in out of home care had experienced the highest number of school and location changes, twelve in all. At the time of the interview, Summer spoke of looking forward to starting a new school in a new country, however, some years later Summer had attended yet another five schools, bringing the total to seventeen in all and was

now experiencing bullying, lack of self-esteem and consequent refusal to attend any school. Undoubtedly, attending seventeen schools over a period of some eleven years seems somewhat extreme. What this example does illustrate however, is the detrimental impact instability has on all children.

Both Dan and Betty had experienced ten changes in school and Kim had attended eight schools, either as a consequence of placement change or expulsion. Mary had attended six schools with Ryan, Abbey, Beth, Andrew, Lara and Tracey having been to five. Of note is that all of these children are in out of home care with Abbey, Beth, Andrew and Lara all living in relatively stable placements. Changes in school in these instances usually occurred as a result of a change in the carer's circumstance as discussed earlier.

"I moved around a lot. I went to about ten schools. I hated it (moving) I got all angry. I just wanted to stay in one spot...it's hard. I hated changing schools." (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

"School ... I love school I don't know where I would be without school. Cause when I am sad and things play on my mind, like with Craig not being there for me." (Beth, 16, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

"I like school a lot because I get to do art." (Abbey, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

"It's not bad (school), I like PE, Art and lunch." (Lara, 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Mary, school and school friends were viewed as very important, particularly in light of the fact that she was about to leave both behind within days of the interview.

"I'll miss it! (school) My teacher, he's really nice and all my friends in the class... I don't want to leave this school! I don't know my new school. Mr. B (her teacher) rang a school down there because he comes from there and he knows. But they couldn't fit me in and so...." (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Robby it was his first year at school, which he talked of enjoying and he was still excited about. When asked what he liked best about school apart from his new-found friends he stated:

“Learning letters, except I can’t anymore cos I learnt them all! But I’m learning words now.”
(5, non-Indigenous, not in care)

Kate and Kristy were both ambivalent about school:

“I like school sometimes. I like dancing, violin and art so sometimes I like it.” (Kate, 11, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

“I hate school! But I like art, reading and music.” (Kristy, 8, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care)

Andrew talked of the future:

“Hopefully I will be able to achieve (in life). I won’t be one of those guys that wreck themselves like drinking and smoking cos that’s no good, cos it wrecks you completely. It’s shameful. I know kids that sniff niko pens in class! It’s really bad!” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

It is of note that some years later as Andrew was leaving the boarding school he was sent to after this interview, he had achieved poor academic levels and had left school with no career direction.

Self Esteem

Self esteem was assessed via a number of mechanisms. For younger respondents signs such as negative self-talk, self-conscious behaviours, ridiculing self and their artwork were analysed. For young people eleven years and over, a questionnaire was devised in order to gain a fuller assessment that looked at culture, body image, self-esteem, drug taking habits and a self rating device that ascertained how they felt about different aspects of their physical self and their abilities. Other indicators included consistent or yo-yo dieting, binge drinking and/or regular drug abuse and self-harming behaviours.

Of this age group, seven (according to Departmental files along with the interviews) had a history of depression of which five were Indigenous or Indigenous/Anglo females. Five participants felt unequal to others and although there was an equal split in responses between male and female participants, all but one was Indigenous and all were in out of home care. One male and three of the females in this group described feelings of not liking their physical self and were highly self-critical. These same young people feared abandonment.

Ryan indicated that he did not spend time over his physical appearance, didn't feel that he was physically unattractive, although he felt his body was not sexually appealing. When asked about his feelings, he felt he wasn't worthy or equal to others and felt that he was a failure with little to be proud of. He also felt useless and felt no good at times. Interestingly he also stated that he felt better about himself now he is settled into a long-term placement:

"I made friends and settled in. I'd say I've changed a lot, changed my confidence. Much better self-esteem yeah!" (15, non-Indigenous, in care)

All of the participants who did not identify as Anglo and were in care displayed self-esteem issues with a marked gender divide around body size and body image, with 90% of the Indigenous and Indigenous/Anglo girls in out of home care over thirteen years having issues with body size and weight.

Strickland (2004) looked at body image and self-esteem for young women and found that girls were greatly influenced by predominately a mother's behaviour and actions towards her own body, but that overall girls had lower self-esteem than boys which was directly linked to body image and weight. Young women in this research not in out of home care displayed a much higher level of self-esteem and acceptance of their physical selves than did young women in out of home care. Betty for example indicated on the questionnaire that she constantly worried about her weight and experienced ups and downs in her health. She also felt that she was sexually attractive, was on a constant crash diet, binge drinks and indicated that she did not like her face and felt unequal to others.

Of the six children who could name things they were good at, five were not in out of home care. Of the five respondents who said they had good qualities one was in care and all but one was female.

Naomi spoke about how she would feel if she was in out of home care:

“I don’t know, I mean if I was in care I wouldn’t feel good about myself if I was in care. Like something with my Mum and Dad or something. I mean I wouldn’t feel good about myself if I stayed in care and not with my family. Yep, definitely it would affect your self-esteem.” (17, Indigenous, not in care)

and for Ryan,

“Oh yes very important yeah because my self-esteem is based upon my personality.” (15, non Indigenous, in care)

Feelings

Responses from the younger children who were shown the feeling cards were also varied. Six of the nine respondents in the five to twelve year old age group could identify the sad card, eight could identify the angry card, five could identify the scared card. Three children in this cohort had difficulty in identifying sad and scared; all of these children were in out of home care.

The children were also asked how often they feel like the picture on the card. Two children said they never felt scared, both were in care and were female. Two stated they never felt angry, again both were in care. Three stated that they felt angry often or nearly all the time. Two said they felt sad often and two said they never felt sad.

Respondents as young as five not in out of home care could recognise anger in themselves and others;

“I sometimes feel angry...like when Mum drives me crazy.” (Robby, 5, non-Indigenous, not in care)

This is in direct contrast to a number of the children in care interviewed. For example Mary said she almost never felt angry, sad or fearful yet her foster mother had expressed concerns about her “*deep seated identity issues*”, her constant angry outbursts and bullying of her younger siblings. She also expressed sadness during the interview without naming it as such. This was particularly so when she spoke of the losses she was about to incur as a result of her relocation.

A number of the children and young people in out of home care spoke of incidences of anger and how they dealt with it, with older participants spontaneously referring to feelings of anger and/or sadness during the interview.

“Sometimes I feel like... why are you doing this? I usually have a rational explanation for what’s going on. So if I feel like that I would just say calm down mate... instead of yelling back. I’ve been doing it since I was little because I know that it’s no good holding onto it. I have mood swings all the time. I want to just be alone.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

He went on to explain further:

“I get angry sometimes but I usually let it go because it’s no use holding a grudge. I hold it inside and then you just have to let it go. If I lash out at them or out at life then life itself is unfair. There’s no use lashing out at life because life brought you here.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

It was during this discussion about anger that Andrew mentioned recently finding out that his birth father was missing.

Dan spoke of feeling angry “*All the time*” because people annoy him but he “*never, never*” feels sad or scared.

Lara spoke of feeling angry:

“If people talk to me in a rude manner like when people talk behind your back. Like they say they are your friend but like they really aren’t and when people like use me.” (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Lara her anger and sadness was connected to trust and betrayal:

“I feel like when a friend talks to another person I don’t know and tells them my personal stuff then I feel like I can’t trust anybody.” (12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For four respondents relationships with either foster siblings or in one case their own siblings was a constant source of anger.

For Alice her sense of sadness turns to anger;

“Missing Mum (foster) (makes me sad) and sometimes when my brother hurts me...I just go into my room and lie down or something. Once when my brother was annoying me I got angry and kicked the wall. I kicked a hole in my bedroom wall!” (10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Andrew said he felt sad sometimes:

“Like with my problem with my big brother (foster). I feel bad but usually have to forgive him for it. If he makes me feel bad I hold it in I don’t forget about it but he thinks I do. If it’s something like bullying like what he does. I’ll talk to him and say look if you do it again then I’ll use Mum and Dad’s assistance. I give him three warnings.” (Andrew, 14, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Abbey talked of feeling constantly angry at her four year old sister:

“I feel angry a lot with my sister. I have to always check because she always stinks. I yell at her.” (8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

Discussion

From the research findings there are strong indications that children in care, particularly Indigenous and Indigenous/Anglo young people, fair badly in comparison to their not-in-care peers. There appears a vast disparity in terms of connectedness, self- esteem, identity and psychological wellbeing for the young people in out of home care compared with those not in care. Children as young as five and six years old were able to articulate clearly their thoughts and opinions, which should not be discounted during case planning.

Young people not in care in all age ranges and both genders were much more connected to their family of origin and extended family and as a result identified culture and cultural practices as being important to their sense of self. Young people in care were much more likely to display attachment issues, felt unable to trust, were unable to recognise emotions, had self-esteem issues, displayed lack of cultural knowledge and a poor sense of self.

Those who were placed with relative foster carers who were connected to their extended family and community fared best in terms of sense of self, self-esteem and a sense of connectedness, even when parents were unavailable and inconsistent. Contact with siblings and extended family was viewed as very important for these young people, with all participants stating that their Department worker never asks them about this kind of contact.

Those young people not in care were able to easily negotiate multi-cultural identity and were able to trace each culture through their family lines and were proud of their cultural heritage. This was in direct contrast to the majority of Indigenous and Indigenous/Anglo young people in out of home care, where negotiating inter-racial identity was an issue and girls in particular displayed high levels of identity confusion and depression.

Chapter Five provided background information about the children in the research whilst this chapter explored the comments made during their interviews, further enhancing our understanding of the complexities of these children's lives. The following chapter explores the artwork made by the children within the context provided by both Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Seven

The Art Works Explored

The participants, as outlined in previous chapters were invited to create artwork as part of the research process. This chapter explores the artwork made by the participants along with the process of the art-making. Including artwork as part of qualitative research methodology is relatively new. As a consequence of the heavy reliance upon text and verbal narrative within qualitative research methodology, it is argued that images and visual research methods have become marginalised (Prosser, 1998). Hence, images are often considered an appendix to, rather than as a primary source of data (Gilroy, 2006).

Historically, visual research methods were derived through the disciplines of visual arts, arts history, visual culture, anthropology, sociology and ethnography. From the art historical tradition, 'sociology integrates the artwork further by asking questions within a particular socio-political context such as; for whom are the artworks made? Why was it made in that particular way? And how is it displayed to its audience?' (Gilroy, 2006, p. 95). To Gilroy, 'art-making can be a way of generating data' in that 'different forms of display and audiencing can invite new understandings' (Gilroy, 2006, p. 96). It is also important to consider the 'audiencing' of the image as a form of triangulation. Rose (2001) considers a simple structure for reading and interpreting the image in terms of 'production', the 'image itself' and 'audiencing' that is, how something is made, what it looks like and how it is seen (cited in Gilroy, 2006, p. 97).

I have utilised the case study format, which includes narrative, display, reflection and theorising. To Gilroy, case study research that draws on visual methods enhances its validity because artworks can triangulate with texts of various kinds. 'Triangulation refers to the use of data from different sources, gathered through different methods' (2006, p. 100). Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from more than two sources. In particular, it refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon.

By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single-method, single-observer and single-theory studies.

In the case of this research, triangulation occurs in several ways. The first is via the reading of images through the narratives surrounding the artworks, including the subconscious narrative such as body language, what we know of the artist's story, and the verbal interviews. The second is the triangulation of audiencing, that is, how the art maker, the researcher and an Aboriginal Artist/Healer view the artwork.

Cohort studies within case-based research often utilise the modality of narration but also draw on discourse and content analysis which could include visual methods to 'identify patterns and visualities across the cohort' (Gilroy, 2006, p. 100). This research also seeks to identify patterns and duplications across the research.

O'Brien researched the use of art-making with traumatised children (child sexual assault) describing how the right side of the brain is damaged by very early, preverbal traumatic experiences. The 'sensual nature' of art materials such as paint and clay and the mess-making during these activities, activates certain parts of the brain, providing a 'visceral reminder' of the trauma experience' (2004, p. 11) Hence to O'Brien, making art in art therapy stimulates right-brain neurological structures that enable early trauma to become known. This position is not unlike that of Perry (2006). The artwork and the art-making can provide a working through of the trauma in a safe way. It is guided by the art maker, who has control over the process, which is in direct contrast to the lack of control experienced during the trauma.

Each child's artwork will be viewed within the context of the interview and the narrative provided by the young person. The method I utilised to generate the art making allowed for free association to occur along with the accompanying narrative. It differs from therapeutic art therapy, in that the latter explores feelings and emotions over a period of time within a therapeutic relationship built on trust, hence both intent and desired outcomes differ.

As a practitioner and researcher in a small Australian regional town it was inevitable that I would have come across a small number of the children in the research in a different capacity. Hence, some young people as discussed previously, I was meeting for the first time, others already knew me as a professional and still others as member of a small regional beach community. Given the nature of the research, this produced an interesting dynamic in that four children, Robby, Lara, Summer and Andrew were aware of me as a “*local*.” This resulted in the building of a quick rapport and a high level of trust during these interviews.

It was continually explained to the children and young people that they can choose to cease the interview at any time, this was particularly so with those afore mentioned four children with whom I had previously engaged. I was also more keenly aware of their body language and verbal tones, should there appear to be any discomfort.

The Art-making Process

Many theorists and researchers have acknowledged the use of art and play when endeavouring to communicate with children. As Case and Daley argue, ‘[t]he image mediates between conscious and unconscious holding and symbolising past, present and future aspects of the client’ (1992, p. 97).

The process utilised in this research, in the case of those participants who chose to create an artwork, began with an invitation to explore the art materials offered. Depending on the age and ability of the child or young person I would then help them set out the chosen materials for use. The choice of art materials is a fundamental part of the art-making process. This choice can be indicative of the need for a level of control by the art-maker as much as to produce the desired effect. For some young people the art-making can provide a safe silent retreat, as the art making in itself can be therapeutic, for others it can provide a shift of focus that provides a free flow of conversation.

It is important, if possible, to take note of how the artwork is made. Is it made with care? What kind of body language is the person displaying? What order were the elements in the work placed and how?

What is the young person's reaction to their work once they feel it is complete? All of these aspects can inform the narrative. On completion the young person was asked if they would like to share their story around the artwork.

Also important is what the young person chooses to do with the artwork once completed. Are they proud of the artwork? What will they name the artwork and how would they describe it? Do they dispose of the artwork and if so, how? Do they take it with them to keep or give it away and if so to whom did they plan to give it?

In the case of some works made by children in this research, some of the children were unable to give a verbal account, with the common response being "*I don't know*", to even denying that they are responsible for making the work in the first place. To Dubowski, this occurs when '[t]hey cannot say what it is because it has no linguistic counterpart' (1990, p. 8). That is, they do not have the language skills and/or insight to express the feelings depicted in the artwork.

Mess-Making

The level of mess made during the process can be related to the child's messy and uncontrollable feelings (Lillitos, 1990). Artwork and art making is always an interplay between bounded and unbounded space. Water based art and play materials, such as paints, clay and sandplay can provide a means by which those feelings experienced as overwhelming can be explored. The more water added to any of the materials, the more liquefied and messy the mixture becomes, which, if water is continually added, will result in overflow. The mixing of all the paints together on a paint pallet or in a water jug most often results in a thick, black/brown sludge. It can also be viewed as regressive behaviour in some instances, such as when an older child continually repeats this state of play to the exclusion of other forms of play and art-making. As part of the analysis I also explored the process and degree of mess-making and the child's reaction to the mess-making, set within the triangulation of the child's story and narrative.

The Art Materials

The children and young people were provided with a range of art materials to choose from. Such materials included lead pencils, coloured pencils, biros, thin and fat felt-tipped pens (textas), collage materials, oil pastels, chalk pastels, acrylic and water colour paint.

The choice of art materials is a fundamental part of the art-making process. This choice can be indicative of the need for a level of control by the art-maker as much as to produce the desired effect. Art materials can be placed upon a continuum of control.

Table 6: Continuum of Control Adapted from Landgarten

Wet Clay	Water Colour	Acrylic paint	Soft pastels & charcoal	Oil pastels	Felt tip pens & textas	Collage	Biros	Coloured pencils	Lead pencils
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Least Controlled.....Most Controlled									

Landgarten's (1987, p.7) continuum is further explained below in regards to each media type.

Pencil

Lead pencil affords the highest level of control. Pencils come in a range of softness from type H (the hardest lead type), which offers the sharpest lines to B type, which is much softer in the lines it is able to produce. Pencil can also be erased easily so any perceived mistakes could be changed. Coloured pencils also offer a high level of control but depending on the colour may be less easily erased or changed.

Biro

Biro also offers a high level of control but is more difficult to erase and offers less choice in colour than coloured pencils.

Collage

Collage usually includes a range of available materials on a two dimensional surface. The control level of using collage is quite high in that articles can be moved around up until the glue dries. Different combinations can be trialed prior to applying any glue. Models using collage materials afford the same level of control but offer a three dimensional view.

Felt-tip pens (textas)

Thin felt-tip pens offer a lower level of control than either pencils or biros in that the tips are usually larger, making it more difficult to achieve a very fine result. The larger the tip, the more control is needed to keep within the boundaries of the work. It is difficult to erase any mistakes made in felt-tip and there is a wide choice in colours available. It is also difficult to blend colours.

Crayon

Crayons are usually fairly widely tipped and are difficult to blend; they offer less control than any medium mentioned thus far. Oil based crayons utilised with acrylic paint can allow for a degree of control in that the oil prohibits the paint from adhering to the surface.

Chalk pastels and charcoal

Both pastels and charcoal are very soft medium which, whilst providing vibrant colours that are easy to blend can be messy to work with, in that the colours come off onto your fingers very easily, which makes it easy to unintentionally smudge the work you are making. Smudges can be erased to some degree although, the darker the colour the more difficult to erase. Charcoal can provide a very deep black and does come in a variety of thicknesses.

The tips of chalk pastels are also usually fairly thick which can add to the perceived lack of control by the user. Pastels are useful for applying large areas of even and/or blended colours.

Paint

Paint can be applied in a variety of ways offering different levels of control e.g. thin or thick paintbrush, fingers, sponge etc. Paint can be blended to make any colour if the primary colours are available. The amount of water added can also effect the level of control. The more water added, the less vibrant the colour. Acrylic paint affords greater control than watercolours, as less water is needed to paint and blend colours.

There is a level of risk involved in using art materials you have not used before, in that there is a degree of experimentation involved. This can be helpful in identifying levels of self-esteem, confidence and resilience. For example Robby had enough self-esteem to be able to experiment with a number of new materials and could withstand the frustration of not producing the result that he was looking for. He held pride in his finished work. This is in contrast to Dan who chose chalk pastels, expressed a degree of frustration and left the work unfinished and spoke disparagingly of the work.

Aboriginal Artist's Process

Mr. Anthony Durwun Lee was invited to comment on the artworks and choose his own process to do so. In terms of process, he chose to first sit with the work and comment on the feelings they evoked for him. If there was more than one work by the same child, he would at first look at them separately then read them in sequence. He would then ask questions about the child, such as, if they were in care or Indigenous. On numerous occasions he would state that by viewing the work he could ascertain that they were Aboriginal. At times he would shake his head at the sadness certain works evoked. I have included Mr. Lee's comments at the end of each child's case study. I have endeavored to retain the narrative context of his comments and analysis.

The table below analyses the artworks across the research cohort in order to identify potential patterns. Abbreviations utilised for brevity within the table are outlined below.

Table 7: Abbreviations legend for Table 8

Theme	The subject matter
Media	Art materials F = feathers, G = Glitter, T = Texta, Pa = Paint, Pl = Plate
M/F	Gender
c	Care status
Ind	Indigenous
I/A & O	Indigenous/Anglo, O signifies other
Gifted	Work was gifted to the researcher
Des	Child destroyed art work once complete
Kept	Child kept artwork
Left	Child disregarded and left work
B/H/L	Boundaries/hidden/layered

Table 8: Usage of Art Work

Name	Theme	Media	M	F	In Care	Ind	I/A	O	Age	Gifted	Des	Kept	Left	B/H/L
Robby	Friends	texta	y					y	5	y				
	Garden									y				
Heidi	Family/ house	paint		y		y			6			y		
Tracey	Nil	plate		y	y		y		7		y			H/L
Tom	Red-Lover	paint	y		y	y			8			y		
Abbey	People	texta/ glitter		y	y	y			8	y				B
	Portrait	paint/ glitter							8	y				
	Card	texta/g ribbon							8	y				L
	Self portrait	texta/g							8	y				B
Kristy	Cultural	paint/f/g		y		y			8			y		
Tony	Nil	paint	y		y	y			10			y		H/L
	Family	texta	y		y	y			10				y	
Alice	Loveheart	crayon		y	y		y		10			y		
Kate	Dream- catcher	String/f/g	y		y			11			y			
	Flag	Paint												
Lara	Storm at sea	pastels		y	y		y		12	y				B
	Sunset at sea	paint/g		y	y		y		12	y				
	Mountains	crayon		y	y		y		12	y				
	Animals	collage/g		y	y		y		12	y				H/L
	Loveheart	texta/g/f		y	y		y		12	y				
	Self portrait	Multi/f		y	y		y		12	y				
Mary	Nil	crayon/ paint		y	y		y		12		y			L
	Rainbow	pencils		y	y		y		12				y	L
Summer	Family	HB pencil		y				y	13			y		
Andrew	Mountains/ house	HB pencil	y		y		y		14	y				
	Self portrait	HB pencil	y		y		y		14	y				
Dan	Nil	pastels	y		y	y			14				y	
Beth	Teardrop	texta		y			y		15				y	H
	Teardrop	texta		y	y		y		15				y	
Nelly	Cultural symbol	B pencils		y		y			16	y				

Sixteen of the twenty research participants created artworks. Five children created two artworks, one child made five artworks and one child made six artworks. The most popular media used was texta, crayon, glitter and lead pencils with only two participants, both girls and of similar age trying a range of media and producing three-dimensional images.

Of the four participants that did not produce an artwork, three were in care and they were all aged fifteen years and over, with three of them being seventeen.

Four children gifted all of their works to the researcher. For Robby, Andrew and Lara, the researcher was known to them, which perhaps informed this decision. Robby created a work before the researcher's arrival and gifted the work before the start of the interview. Lara wrote 'For Michelle' at the top of one of her works and made a point of gifting the other works she created. Andrew also explained that he wanted the interviewer to have both his works. Abbey was the only child in this group who was not known to the interviewer outside of the research. Abbey too, had made a card for the interviewer and presented the card at the beginning of the interview. She also made a point of gifting all of the works at the interview's conclusion.

Seven participants kept all, or some of the works they created. It is interesting to note that all but one child in this group, (Tony) either had only made one work or in the case of Kate kept both works. Tony however kept his painting but left his family drawing. Three of these seven participants were in care, two were siblings and the third (Alice) kept her artwork particularly to gift to her foster carer. These participants exhibited a high level of pride in the works they kept. This was in direct contrast to the four children who just left the works at the end of the interview. All of those children were in care and displayed lack of pride and/or acknowledgment of their work. In my experience as a child therapist, this type of reaction is often indicative of a child's sense of self-worth. This is further displayed in the destruction of the work as exhibited by Mary and Tracey who, it is interesting to note, are siblings and presented, in my view, as amongst the most traumatised, as evidenced by the level of multiple long-term trauma, data regarding their behaviours outside of this contact along with demonstrated behaviours and dialogue expressed during the research.

If we were to look further at the narratives surrounding the work of the children who either left or destroyed work, along with what we know of these children's history, all of the children have been in care for over five years and they were all struggling with issues of multiple trauma and loss. This entire group had major identification and anger issues with their father and one had relationship issues with both parents.

Boundaries

A boundary is 'A line which marks the limits of an area' (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). Boundaries by nature can be utilised to both contain within the border and inhibit. They can be used to protect, as well as dictate. Boundaries in the context of the artwork in this research, refers to both the boundary of the materials being used, that is, the size of the paper, and those created by the art-maker. For example, two of the participants drew borders as part of their drawings. Abbey began by drawing the frame first and then enclosing the figure of herself inside. Given Abbey's narrative of not needing anyone, perhaps the frame provides a level of psychological protection from the non-existent mother who remains in the narrative of the drawing but is absent from the drawing itself. Lara drew her favourite place (*Artwork 16*) and then added a thick black border as if to contain the storm it depicts.

As documented (Herman, 1992), trauma of any kind represents an interruption or obliteration of personal boundaries. Many traumatised children replay this disruption by exhibiting "*difficult behaviours*", as outlined in previous chapters. In terms of the artwork, this disruption can be visualised in the extension of the artwork beyond the natural boundary of the paper. Of the five children whose art-making extended beyond the page or plate, all were in care.

Similarly, five children used layering in their work, which conversely means that certain objects remain hidden or partly obscured. Six participants created works where aspects were hidden or obscured, all of these children were in care and all were Indigenous or Indigenous/Anglo.

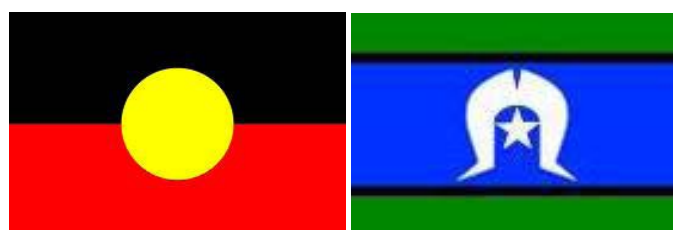
Three of this group also displayed contradictory elements in their work, for example Beth produced an image of a teardrop with a smile (*Artwork 27*) and Lara spoke of her favourite place as being the beach with calm waters and clean shoreline, unlike the artwork she produced of the scene which is dark and turbulent (*Artwork 16*).

Nature featured in nine artworks and the sun featured in five artworks. Love-hearts featured in three artworks.

Culture

The two diagrams below are representations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations' flags. They are included here as a reference, for a number of the artworks made reference to these two flags. The Aboriginal flag is a well-known symbol, recognisable throughout the world. Designed in the 1970s by Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia, it is a symbol of national Aboriginal identity. The flag was chosen as the official flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 and in 1995 the Australian Government officially recognised the flag under section 5 of the Flags Act 1953. More recently, the flag was displayed by Cathy Freeman, an Aboriginal sports identity (who, coincidentally originates from the same area as the children in the research), during a gold medal victory lap at the Olympics. Symbolically, the colour black represents the Aboriginal people of Australia. The red represents the red earth, the red ochre and the spiritual connection to the land. Yellow represents the sun, the giver of life and protector.

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by Bernard Namok from Thursday Island as part of a design competition in 1992. The flag was recognised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 1992 and by the Australian Government in 1995. Symbolically the green represents the land, blue represents the sea, white represents peace and black represents the Indigenous peoples. The Dhari (headdress) represents the Torres Strait Islander people and the five-pointed star represents the five major Island groups. The star also represents navigation and is symbolic of the seafaring culture.



Three children visually referenced the flag in their work. Two children (siblings) not in care were very symbolic in their use of the Aboriginal flag. One of the children that referenced the Torres Strait Islander flag in their artwork were not from that culture. One child drew her totem which is the Frangipani flower.

Family and Self Portraits

Seven children created works that they stated represented themselves and/or their family of origin. The table below analyses these works.

Table 9: Family and Self Portraits

Name	Robby	Heidi	Abbey		Tom	Lara	Summer	Andrew
Title	My Best Friend And Me	Having Fun At Home	My Family	Hello Sun	Family Drawing	My Personality	Mr Sun	Self
Age	5	6	8		10	12	13	14
Included	Self best friend	Self mother sister	Self mother Father brother	Self	Self mother father brothers sisters	Nil	Dog self mother	Self
Absent	Nil	Father 5 Siblings	Sister	Mother	Baby Sibling	Nil	Father	Nil
In Care	N	N	Y		Y	Y	N	Y
Gender	M	F	F		M	F	F	M
Indigenous	N	Y	Y		Y	Y	N	Y
Media	Texta	Paint	Texta	Texta	Texta	Multi 3D	Pencil	Pencil
Missing	Nil	Noses	Hands Legs Feet	Hands Nose Feet Legs Feet	Mother Father Have No Faces. Sibling Has No Face Or Limbs	Limbs	Legs Feet	Body Neck
Space	Upper page	Figures as large as house	Figures in lower half of page	Figure lower left	Figures in landscape format	N/A	Figures take up entire page	Face takes up entire space
Activity	Playing	Standing	Posing For Camera	Standing	Standing	N/A	Standing	N/A
Self Place	Self larger but same colour as friend	Self in centre, same colour as mother	Self between mum and dad	Alone	Self next to siblings that have most contact with him	N/A	Next to dog	N/A

Of this group, three were in out of home care, three were male and four were female. All but one was Indigenous.

Three participants created self-portraits. Two of these were siblings and all three were in care. One participant used a HB lead pencil giving the highest level of control, one chose texta and the other chose collage. All of these media are on the upper end of control on the continuum. Andrew's self-portrait (*Artwork 25*) is mask-like in its appearance, with the head unattached to either the neck or the body. Lara's involved the use of collage materials to create two distinct three-dimensional faces (*Artwork 21*). It is interesting to note that both Andrew and Lara are among the three children who were unaware of their Aboriginality, yet Lara's initial figure is a black male face and Andrew's face takes on an Indigenous appearance. Abbey's work (*Artwork 9*) is about an access visit with Mum in the park, but the end result is a self-portrait with the hands, legs, nose and feet missing. In all of the works cited in the above table, limbs were the most commonly omitted. Missing body parts in drawings is not uncommon in children who are traumatised (Ater, 2006; Petersen, 1994) (Malchiodi, 2002).

Of the four family drawings, two were created by children in out of home care. All four works excluded some family members or identifying features of family members. The two children not in out of home care omitted male members of the family. In Summer's (*Artwork 23*) case her father lives on another continent and has started a new family. Heidi (*Artwork 3*) excluded her step father along with five female half-siblings. In the work of the other two children who are in care, Abbey (*Artwork 10*) omits her youngest sibling. The picture depicts a happier time for Abbey, before her father died and prior to the birth of her sister with whom she at present has a relationship fraught with ambivalence. Tom depicted all of his family (*Artwork 12*), however his parents remain faceless and his youngest sibling floats above the parents and has no face or limbs. It is interesting to note that in the case of these last two works, both chose the same colour texta as their choice of background colour. For Abbey, pink texta on a pink background and for Tom, red texta on a red background. Both works make the figures difficult to see, with some figures drawn lighter, fading into the background.

In all of these family drawings, the placement of the self confirmed whom the individual articulated they were close to during the interview. For Summer, her dog takes centre stage and is drawn in a detailed fashion.

Both Abbey and Heidi drew themselves centrally between two other figures with at least one of these being a parental figure. Tom drew himself between his two siblings and these three figures appear to recede in the background next to the faceless figure of his mother.

Mess-making as explored earlier can be part of the art making process. The table below analyses the level of mess-making and the child's reaction to the mess they had made. Y/N represents yes or no and H/L represents high and low levels.

Table 10: Mess- Making

Name	Age	In Care Y/N	Gender	Indigenous Y/N	Degree of mess H/L	Reaction to mess
Robby	5	N	M	N	H	Exploration, acceptance
Heidi	6	N	F	Y	L	Nil
Tracey	7	Y	F	Y	H	Destructive
Tom	8	Y	M	Y	H	Acceptance
Abbey	8	Y	F	Y	L	Highly boundaried
Tony	10	Y	M	Y	H	Contained
Kristy	8	N	F	Y	L	Nil
Alice	10	Y	F	Y	L	Nil
Kate	11	N	F	Y	L	Nil
Lara	12	Y	F	Y	L	Nil
Mary	12	Y	F	Y	H	Destructive
Andrew	14	Y	M	Y	L	Highly contained
Summer	14	N	F	N	L	Highly contained
Dan	14	Y	M	Y	H	Non-acceptance
Beth	15	Y	F	Y	H	Contained
Nelly	16	Y	F	Y	L	Nil

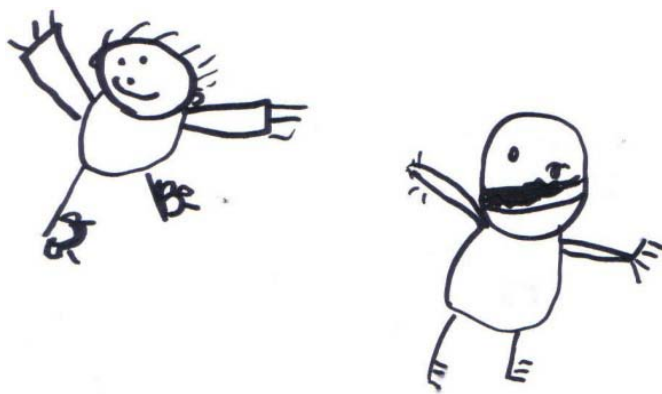
Of the sixteen children and young people who created artworks, seven exhibited a high level of mess-making. Of this group all but one (Robby) were in care and Indigenous. Two (siblings) reacted destructively towards the mess-making product. Two participants had a high level of mess-making but contained the mess and four participants in total either destroyed or did not accept the mess-making or the final product.

A number of the images of the participant's artwork have been digitally enhanced. I have stated clearly under each image where this has occurred. Many of the artworks were signed or displayed some identifying symbol such as family names. These have been omitted in order to provide confidentiality. Some images were also brightened in order to aid the viewer. Aside from the removal of names and change in exposure to aid the visual, in no cases were images tampered with.

Review of each participant's artwork

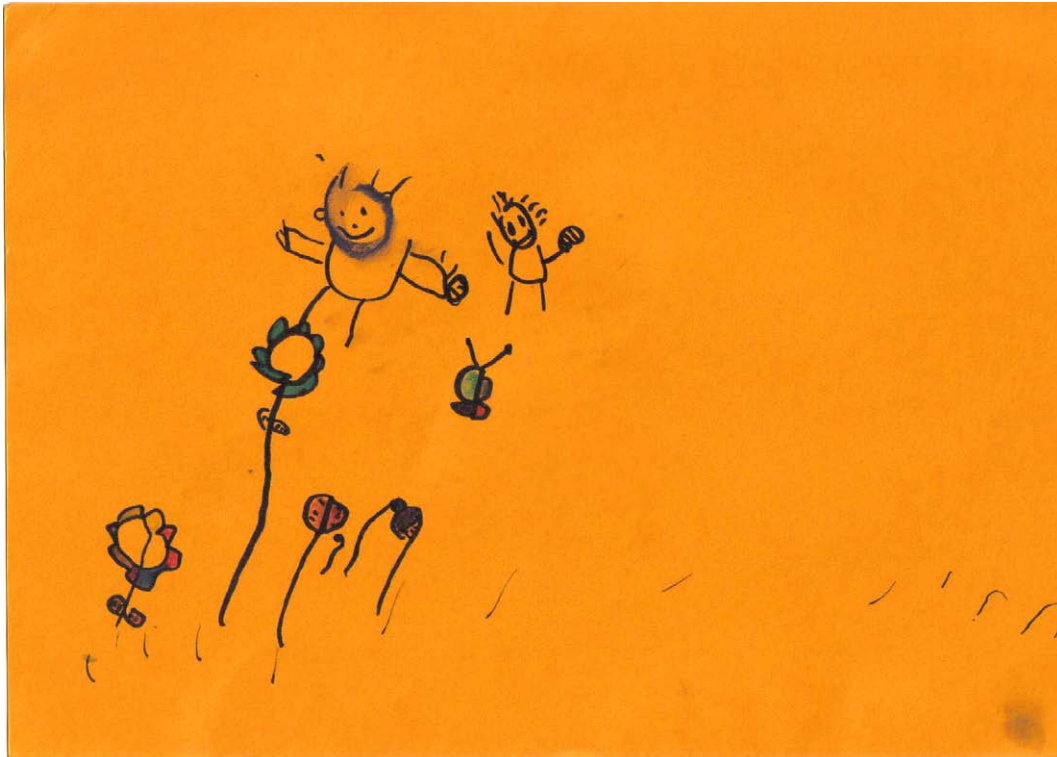
Robby - Age 5

Robby is a Anglo/Dutch boy (not in care) who chose the garden in which to conduct the interview and was neatly dressed for a party due to take place that afternoon.



Artwork 1 My Best friend and Me

This first drawing, *Artwork 1*, Robby made as a gift to the researcher upon arrival. Typical of a child his age, Robby is able to make pictorial representations of entire figures such as animals or humans. For this initial artwork he chose thin black felt-tip on white A4 paper. Robby has drawn himself on the right and the two figures differ in height and features.



Artwork 2 Easter

As part of the interview a range of art materials were provided, and Robby was very keen to try out new materials. He asked questions about the materials and how he might use them as he went through the box of materials provided. We had spoken about charcoal during our discussion and he requested that I find the charcoal or, in his words, *“the one that makes you dirty”* and proceeded to choose orange A4 paper on which to start his picture. After a short try with the charcoal he announced that, *“this is hard to use”* and asked for something else to use. This indicates that Robby had a definite result in mind and he was comfortable with a level of risk-taking, experimentation and possible failure. He also felt confident to ask for what he wanted. He could have chosen to start again on another sheet but he rather continued with the marked sheet with which he had started. He chose thin black felt-tip pen. He chatted while he completed his drawing. He pointed to plants in his garden that he had added to the drawing of his best friend and himself in his garden, looking for Easter eggs. He then announced he was going to colour it in and chose an orange felt tip to use on the orange paper.

Robby voiced a degree of frustration in not being able to see the colour he had applied when he announced:

“I can’t see it. You can’t going over the lines or the black will come out..” He then chose another colour and without using it announced:

“Umm...smudges. Everything doesn’t smudge. Black doesn’t smudge. That’s the only colour that doesn’t smudge. That’s a nice colour (uses the tan felt-tip)...it smudged! Where’s my favourite colour? There’s no point on that one...yep smudge!”

Robby had been trying to colour in his outlined picture and was finding it difficult to keep within the outline. He completed his drawing by utilising brush pens to colour his found Easter eggs in red.

Robby’s artwork was very much in the here-and-now, in that he was very excited about it being Easter and, having just started school, was making some new friendships. Robby chose his subject matter and did not ask for ideas on what to draw. He also asked what would happen to the drawing and was very proud of his drawings once completed. Once he realised that the artwork would be safe he decided to give the artwork to the researcher along with the initial drawing. In both artworks, the two figures display a similar stance and are standing close to each other. In *Artwork 2*, the figures float on the left-hand side of the landscape. In *Artwork 1*, he has drawn the figures within a portrait format. There also appears to be, at some level, a sense of perspective in both works.

Robby seemed at ease in exploring the art materials, although experienced some degree of frustration in getting the materials to produce the effect he wanted. He also knew exactly what he wanted to title both drawings. It is interesting to note his reaction to the transgression of the drawings boundaries, as it was important to him to ensure that the transgression did not occur. He had no problem making choices in terms of what to draw and how to draw it. He did not ask for help in executing the drawing. He also began each time by drawing himself and he is always the largest figure on the page. In both drawings his friend’s figure faces towards him, whilst he is looking away from his friend out to the viewer or into the garden. His friend appears to stand behind him in both drawings.

Robby was the only participant in the research who chose to draw a friend and although several children in the research included gardens or parks in their work, Robby's garden was very colourful in comparison, as it included a number of colourful plants and a butterfly. The figure of Robby smiles happily into the garden in *Artwork 2*. Robby's appearance changes in the works in that, in *Artwork 1* his self-figure has no hair, the head is more oval-shaped and the mouth does not appear to smile. In the latter work, the figures take on a similar appearance although the self-figure is double the size of his friend, which can be indicative of a healthy sense of self.

The 'tadpole' man is a very common, early pictorial tool utilised by children, usually up to the age of four or five years (Case and Dalley, 1992). Prior to a child being able to produce such a figure they must first master the circle. This configuration often becomes sequential in how it is produced, for example drawing the circle for the head and then attaching a circle for the body.

On viewing *Artwork 1*, Mr. Lee commented on how "light" and "happy" the work seemed. He also noticed the school shoes on the figure of Robby's friend, which gives the work a situational context. For *Artwork 2*, Mr. Lee again spoke of a feeling of happiness and how this happiness reaches "*up from the centre of the page. It's light and happy...gleeful, they are flying and have no feet.*" He asked whom the figures represented. Mr. Lee stated that he thought this child was not in care and that he sees himself as important as his friend is always placed behind him.

In Robby's case his artwork is congruent with data collection via the interview and information volunteered by his parent. Robby's pictures are very much in the here-and-now and as Mr. Lee pointed out, there is a certain "*gleefulness*" about the works that deepen our understanding of how Robby feels about school, his new friends and finding chocolate Easter eggs in the garden. Robby's process of art making suggests a healthy testing of boundaries.

Heidi - Age 6

Heidi (aged 6, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care) at first spent some time looking around the art-room before deciding what she might use. She chose an A1 sheet of white paper and paints but was hesitant in choosing her subject matter and looked to the interviewer for direction. The researcher made several suggestions, such as my favourite place, myself, the most important things to you, etc. Heidi chose to paint her family.



Artwork 3 Having Fun at Home

The painting is in landscape, with a house on the left-hand-side and three figures that take up over half of the picture. Heidi chose the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue. She proceeded to mix the colours and water them down. She began by painting the purple/red figure of her mother closest to the house. She then painted a figure in similar colours for herself. On the right-hand-side stands her sister, Nelly, her older half-sibling that was also interviewed as part of the research, who appears taller and is painted in red. The similarities between the two figures closest to the house suggest that Heidi identifies strongly with her mother. The figure of her sister appears to dominate the others in size and colour.

A full sun appears to the upper right with a dominant red cloud over them. The painting displays a limited knowledge of perspective and although the entire paper is utilised, the picture remains within the boundary of the paper. Heidi described the painting as being about the weekend at home and that it was a nice day with everyone happy. She did not expand on the narrative or spoke as to where her other siblings or father were in the drawing.

Heidi talked about loving art whilst she was working and was proud of her work when it was completed. It was explained to Heidi by the researcher that the work would have to be left to dry and arrangements were made for the artwork to be sent to her once it was dry. Heidi seemed happy at this and trusted that the work would be returned to her.

On closer examination, both the figure of herself and her mother have the same colour facial features, body and hair, as opposed to her sister whose body is the same red as the big cloud hanging over the figures and the smoke that comes out of the chimney. The half-sister has blue eyes and yellowy hair, which belies the fact that both girls have dark hair and eyes. It did not concern Heidi that the three primary colours became mixed as she used them and she chose a large size paintbrush to complete the entire painting. There was very little mess as a result of making the work. Heidi also chose the largest size paper available which is perhaps indicative of the importance she places on these relationships. Like Robby, the self-figure is as large as the others, which indicates a healthy sense of self.

The house itself is a common design utilised by children generally who have had a western education. Of interest however, is the long thin shape of the house, which deviates from the stock design, and the use of a chimney, given that Heidi has lived all her life in a sub-tropical climate where very few households have fireplaces. There are no windows in the house, which again deviates from the stock design. Andrew has also used the same stock design in *Artwork 22*, however he has provided windows and omitted the chimney. On reflection the house takes on the appearance of a rocket with a sky dominated by a red cloud that could have originated from the chimney.

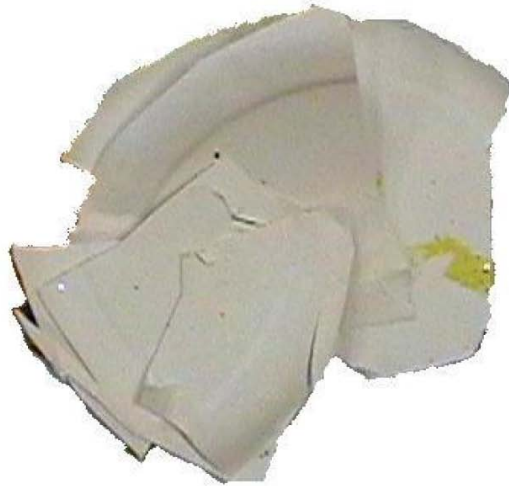
Mr. Lee again also commented on the “*gleeful*” nature of the artwork. He felt that it was a happy painting that depicts openness in its body language. The figures he noted “*take up most of the page.*” Mr. Lee asked who the figures were and concluded that the mother and sister were very important to her and were the same size as the house. The clouds, like the figures, were in threes, yet the sun is small and everyone is happy. He noted that there was no green, so part of the colour spectrum was missing. He did not mention what culture he thought Heidi was from.

Heidi’s artwork in the main is congruent with other data in that as the youngest female child, she enjoys a particularly close relationship with her mother. Of interest is the use of red on her sister, the clouds and their faces and hair. The half-sister is clearly differentiated from herself and the mother and yet her other five siblings are omitted altogether. This is not contradictory in itself to the other data collected, and Heidi did not provide a further narrative to help clarify this. Nelly her half-sister also spoke of having a close relationship with her mother, so perhaps some sibling rivalry exists for their mother’s attention.

Tracey - Age 7

Tracey (aged 7, Indigenous/Anglo, in care). Prior knowledge of the level of trauma both Tracey and Mary had experienced, along with their increasingly concerning behaviours allowed the researcher a better understanding of their behaviours during the workshop and interviews. For Mary this meant that when she began to talk of her family she did not have to retell her story. For Tracey, her lack of engagement and choice not to return for the interview was viewed within the context of her current mental health issues which included; self-harming behaviours, aggression and cruelty toward her siblings, other children and animals, along with some early indication of hallucinations and psychosis.

Tracey took part on some level in the art group but presented as withdrawn, sullen and disengaged. She did not interact with the other children and at times, when she did approach the table, remained on the outer physical periphery of the group, or she at times sat next to the researcher but would not engage further. She did not interact with her sibling, who was also in the group. *Artwork 4* remained untitled and discarded after the group.



Artwork 4 Untitled

Tracey chose to utilise a paper plate that had been placed on the table with the other art materials to be used as a collage material or to provide a palette for paint mixing. She began by making gouges in the plate with the end of a paintbrush. She then proceeded to tear and fold the plate onto itself. She created the work at the art table and seemed unconcerned when yellow paint from the table marked the side of the plate. She then appeared to lose interest and sat in the corner away from the group.

Tracey's disengagement from the group continued in her inability to share her work or the workspace. Her energetic gouging, tearing and folding of the plate could be indicative of her repressed anger. There were craft scissors available, but Tracey chose to use the end of a paintbrush, to poke holes, gouge and tear the plate. What she produced was a torn, broken plate folded in on itself. She spent quite a lot of time and energy producing the work but it remained colourless and ultimately discarded.

Tracey's art-making process is, in my experience, typical for a child with complex trauma. The work represents a working through of the trauma on an unconscious level. Tracey was completely engrossed whilst making the artwork and this was her only point of engagement. There is a safety, and for some, a level of catharsis for the art-maker in the process itself; however Tracey's disengagement from the artwork may be indicative of her need to also disengage from the overwhelming feelings the work represented.

Tracey's work was one of the works that Mr. Lee felt distressed by. He noted the violence in the work and asked what the child did with the work once she finished it. When I explained that she had discarded the work he stated, "*She wants to be hidden, she doesn't want to be seen.*" Mr. Lee spoke of the gouging action representing a sense of "disintegration" and that "*her spirit inside was in a sorry state.*" Mr. Lee stated that he sensed that she was "*a traumatised child in care, and did not speak of her culture.*"

For Tracey, her artwork can deepen our understanding of how or indeed if, she is coping. Other data collected via files notes and as volunteered by the carer provided a contextual basis for her behaviour, and as reported by her concerned carer and exhibited, via the artwork and the art making.

The artwork reflects Tracey's destructive behaviours towards herself (as in her suicidal ideation) whilst her behaviour of segregating herself from the group along with her body language of sitting slumped in the corner on the floor could indicate depression. Of concern is Tracey's refusal to attend counselling, given her current emotional state. It was of interest to note that at times Tracey would place herself next to the researcher but would not engage any further. As a therapist, I have found this behaviour not unusual when working with children with complex PTSD, where trust needs to be built slowly and at the pace the child dictates.

Tom - Age 8



Artwork 5 Red is for Lover

Tom (aged 8, Indigenous, in care). Tom spent his time in the art room next to his brother and appeared influenced by his older brother's actions. He chose a white piece of A3 paper in landscape and paint. He did not mix the colours but applied them straight onto the page in two segments. Tom declined to share his work with the group or talk about it. When asked if he had a name for the work, he said no, but then added "*Red is for Lover.*" There was a high level of mess-making in the application of the paint exceeding the paper boundaries. The colour red dominates the work. Tom stated that he had enjoyed the art group, although he and his brother Tony displayed some difficulty in sharing the materials.

Tom chose to use a wide brush and exceeded the boundaries of the paper on all four sides. He painted a blue area first and was unconcerned when the red paint he used transgressed slightly where the blue had been applied. He was proud of his work and wanted to ensure that the work would be returned to him once it was dry.

On viewing Tom's Artwork, Mr. Lee spoke of the *"guarded and cautious nature"* of the work and that it spoke to him of a sense of resilience. He stated that there was a sense of *"control"* in his use of colour. Mr. Lee asked about the title and stated *"He defined the love, but I am not sure what the blue is for and he painted it in landscape."* He also noticed that the strokes were different, the blue brush strokes being *"quiet and deep"* and the red strokes being *"energetic."* Mr. Lee also thought that this child was in care and he asked if he was Indigenous, which he is.

Given the abstract nature of Tom's artwork, perhaps a more comprehensive understanding of the work would have been attained had Tom provided a narrative. That being said, the red dominates the work and the landscape format creates an interesting tension. Tom's history of multiple abuse and trauma are reflected in his increasingly reactive and aggressive behaviours as reported in other data collected. At this stage Tom was being screened by Child Mental Health for ADHD, due to these behaviours which, as highlighted in Chapter Three can prove problematic for children with undiagnosed PTSD whereby these behaviours often represent a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Abbey - Age 8

Abbey (aged 8, Indigenous/Anglo, in care). Abbey created five artworks in total. The first two she created as part of the art group. She chose to use a white paper plate for both works.



Artwork 6 All the People of the World

In *Artwork 6*, Abbey chose to use black texta and blue glitter. The figure of Abbey sits in the centre of the plate within a circle of glitter that encloses the figure and separates her from the other figures that surround the plate. The centre figure was drawn first; she then added the other figures and added the glitter last. The central figure is also much larger than the others. All the figures, bar one, remain within the boundaries of the plate and their allotted circle. Only the figure directly above the head of the central figure has a limb that extends past the physical boundary of the inner plate. The figures are drawn in thin black texta and the glitter boundary is blue.

Abbey did not need prompting in terms of subject matter. The glitter boundary around the central figure is maybe indicative of Abbey's feelings of isolation and lack of trust as revealed during her interview.

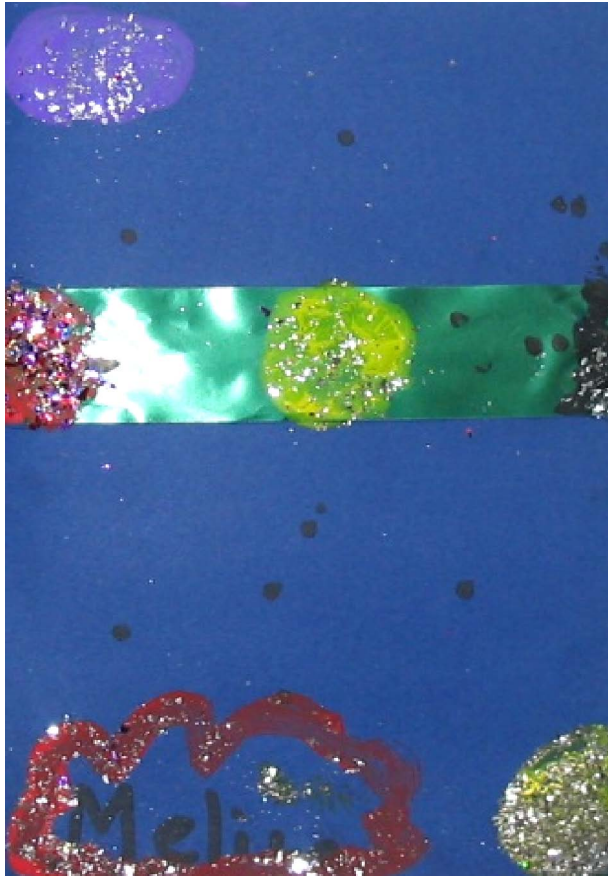


Artwork 7 Dumb Face

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure visual clarity and confidentiality.

For her second work, Abbey chose to use blue and black paint and glitter. She began by painting the black eyes, blue nose and black and blue mouth. She also painted some black hair on the top of the face. She applied blue glitter to the hair, mixing it in with the black paint and gold glitter to the eyebrows and nose. She then stuck four 'google' eyes, one on the mouth, another on the nose and one on each eye. Unlike the first work, she signed this work. She named it '*Dumb Face*' in front of the group but did not want to talk about it. The black smiling mouth follows the indent of the plate and the 'google' eye stares out from the mouth, which may be indicative of Abbey feeling like she needs to watch what she says. In both works Abbey uses circles, boundaries, the colours black and blue and dark glitter.

Abbey was able to share her work with the rest of the group and engaged with the other participants.



Artwork 8 Card for the Researcher

Abbey arrived for the one-on-one interview carrying a card she had made to give to the researcher. She chose dark mauve paper and had written in red, making it hard to read. She stuck some green ribbon on the front, which she decorated with paint and glitter.

Artworks 9 and 10 were created by Abbey as part of the one-on-one interview.



Artwork 9 Hello Sun

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure visual clarity and confidentiality.

Abbey chose a light lavender coloured piece of A4 paper and brown felt-tipped pen. She began by drawing a ruled border. She picked up a purple felt-tip and began to draw herself, to the centre-left of the picture. The figure remains truncated by the border with no hands, legs or feet visible. The figure wears a purple dress with the word DOG written across the bottom of it and a purple flower floats above it. The face is comprised of thick red lips, eyes that stare out into the distance and black straight hair. There is no nose on the figure, which is in contrast to the two plate portraits she had created previously. She then took crayons and drew a yellow sun shape in the left hand corner. Last she added eight purple love-hearts evenly spaced around the border of the work and some blue glitter, which swirls around her stomach area and in the love hearts.

The researcher asked Abbey about the drawing that she called 'Hello Sun' and Abbey explained that, *"It's just me walking around in the park to meet mum."* Although her drawing is situated in the park, there is no green or vegetation to indicate that she is in a park. She is alone in the drawing within a very bordered and organised frame.

The researcher asked Abbey what she was feeling in the painting and she stated she is happy in the drawing, yet the figure's gaze confronts the viewer. Abbey's expression in the drawing along with her stated inability to trust or tell anyone when she is unhappy is indicative of her repressed anger. This anger comes to the fore at times with her siblings as evidenced during the interview. Abbey seemed also unable to recognise the facial signs for sadness on the feeling cards, and during the interview she stated that, "*I never feel sad.*"

Unlike her other work, Abbey has taken time to draw actual facial features which reflect her Islander appearance. Given Abbey's comments during the interview in not being able to trust anyone, it was no surprise that the figure stands alone. Of interest is that the narrative around the drawing was about contact visits with mum, which are always supervised. Her name (which is blanked out) took up a large proportion of the drawing and is written in large block letters using a mauve texta. Perhaps a statement of "*I am here*", which is not surprising given Abbey's ambivalence towards her mother, along with the fact that she had, at this stage requested the ceasing of access visits due to her mother's ongoing alcohol dependence. There had been numerous occasions too when her mother had not turned up for organised access visits. This concurs with her statement during the interview, that if she were to take the most important things with her to a deserted island, she would take a mobile phone in case she needed to call her mother to see how she is and so she could call an ambulance for her if needed.

There have been numerous occasions throughout her short life that she and her brother have had to do exactly that, as a consequence of her mother's alcohol issues.



Artwork 10 My Family

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure visual clarity and confidentiality. The figures are not drawn as vividly as depicted here.

Abbey chose a pink piece of paper and red biro to draw her family portrait. Which, due to the figures remaining only outlines, the figures have a tendency to recede into the background. She began by drawing herself as she began to talk me through the drawing as she worked.

"Mum would be next to me, then Dad next to her, next to Mum is my brother, beside Dad would be my sister and then my brother." These two siblings are not included in the drawing. She went on to explain, *"My Dad's dead. I look like me Dad. This is when I was in pre-school when I was five."*

She then went on to explain that she had a photo taken at the time and this picture was a copy of the photo of when her Dad was still alive and before her sister was born. Abbey spoke at length during the interview about her extended family, whom she does not get to see. It is no surprise that her older sister and brother are absent from the family drawing given the lack of contact that has occurred since being taken into care.

Abbey was asked what she would say to Dad in the drawing and she replied, *"Hi Dad"* and *"smile."* Dad, in reply would say, *"I am, I am, I am."* Abbey was asked what she would say to her mother and she replied, *"I wouldn't say anything"* but her mother would say to Abbey, *"Why haven't you brushed your hair?"*

When asked what she would say to her brother, she replied “*I hate you!*” and he would reply “*I hate you too!*” Abbey’s relationship with her brother is of interest given that he would often act as her protector when she was younger. Abbey expressed a high level of ambivalence towards him and she ridiculed his image as she made it, dressing him like a girl.

The father figure takes up a large section of the frame, with her mother drawn slightly smaller than the figure of herself. The brother remains taller than the other figures but very much thinner hence he appears almost squashed into the right-hand-side of the paper. All the figures remain truncated, much like her self-portrait in ‘*Hello Sun*’, with no hands, legs or feet. The father figure stares straight out to the viewer, as do the figures of herself and her brother. The mother appears to stare blankly and leans away from the figure of herself. Interestingly, the mother is the only figure drawn with eyebrows which gives the eyes a heavy lidded appearance. Abbey displays similar facial features to her father but the brother resembles the mother figure, even down to the pigtails. Abbey’s mother is Anglo with grey hair. The brother also has a smaller head, which gives the figure an elongated look, with unnaturally long arms and trunk. Abbey giggled as she was drawing the brother’s and mother’s pigtails as she exclaimed, “*making them look like girls.*”

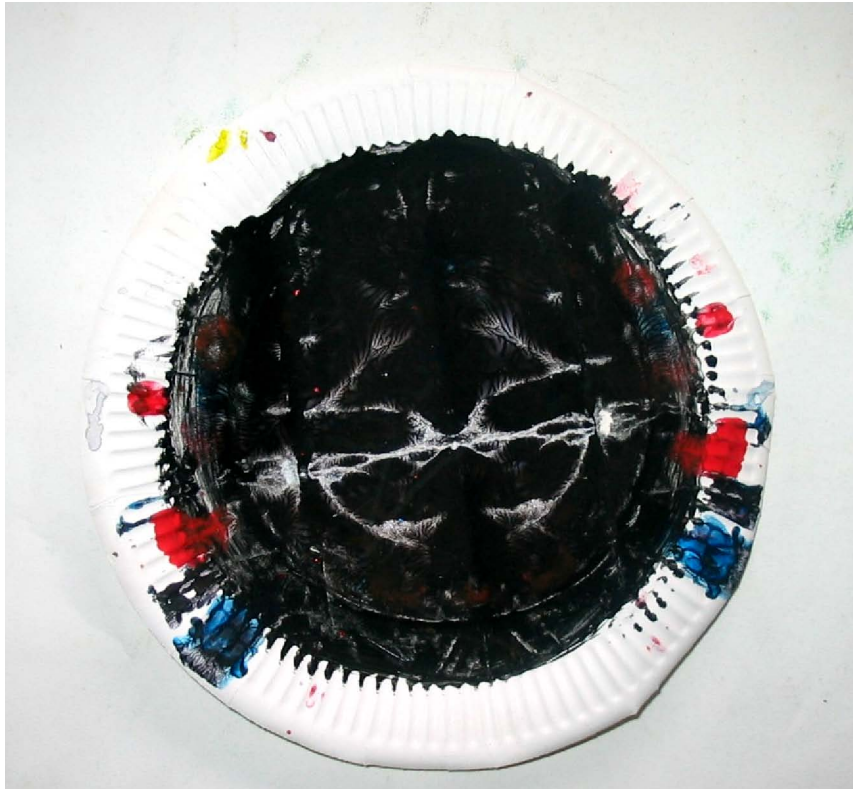
On viewing *Artwork 6, All the People of the World*, Mr. Lee stated that he felt that the work depicted a “*lack of trust*” that “*She has to create a bubble around herself to keep herself safe.*” The smile in *Artwork 7, Dumb Face*, to Mr. Lee, “*was not really a smile, it’s false.*” From looking at the work he stated that he felt, “*Abbey was watching what she says and how she acts and feels unable to be true to the self. She also likes blue.*” He then looked at the third work in sequence, *Artwork 8, Card for the Researcher*, and commented that she used a lot of circles and asked if she was Indigenous. Mr. Lee spent a longer time analysing *Artwork 9, ‘Hello Sun’*, when he noted that art-making was important to this child. He spoke of how sad and confused the figure was and that the border was drawn with a ruler. He noted: “*She can draw a happy face but didn’t. The swirling glitter and flower on her dress is messy like she’s messed up inside and the word dog. She’s emotionally confused. She wears the love hearts on the outside of the drawing behind the border.*”

In regards to the family drawing, *Artwork 10*, he noted the expressions. “*The mother and brother wear happy faces. The father’s face is mask-like and dead-pan, serious. The eyes on her are downcast.*” Mr. Lee confirmed that he thought that she would be in care which she is.

Abbey’s numerous artworks help deepen our understanding of Abbey’s sense of self. The protective barriers in *All the People of the World* and *Hello Sun*, along with the title *Dumb Face* and the use of the word DOG on her dress in *Hello Sun* all confirm the interview findings in regards to Abbey’s poor sense of identity, self-esteem and lack of trust. Abbey’s relationships with her family of origin were clearly explored in her family drawing and narrative. Rather than depict her family as it is today, Abbey chose to depict her family, as it was when her father was alive, which was perhaps, as indicated in her narrative during the interview, a happier time for her. Abbey presented as eager to please at both the art making group and the interview, yet spoke of being unable to trust. Abbey’s artwork can also deepen our understanding of the myriad of conflicting emotions she likely feels for her mother. In *Hello Sun*, Abbey depicts herself alone in a barren landscape. According to other data collected via case files, it was not unusual for her mother to skip contact visits without explanation and *Hello Sun* could therefore be a visual depiction of just such a time. From Abbey’s narrative there is no doubt that she still has concern and love for her mother, but at the same time feels a level of responsibility for her (as in needing a mobile to call an ambulance if her mother needs her to) and has had to take the adult step of refusing to see her mother in order to protect herself. The artworks also helps us to understand that Abbey’s lack of trust has perhaps led to feelings of isolation inflicted upon the self as a form of protection.

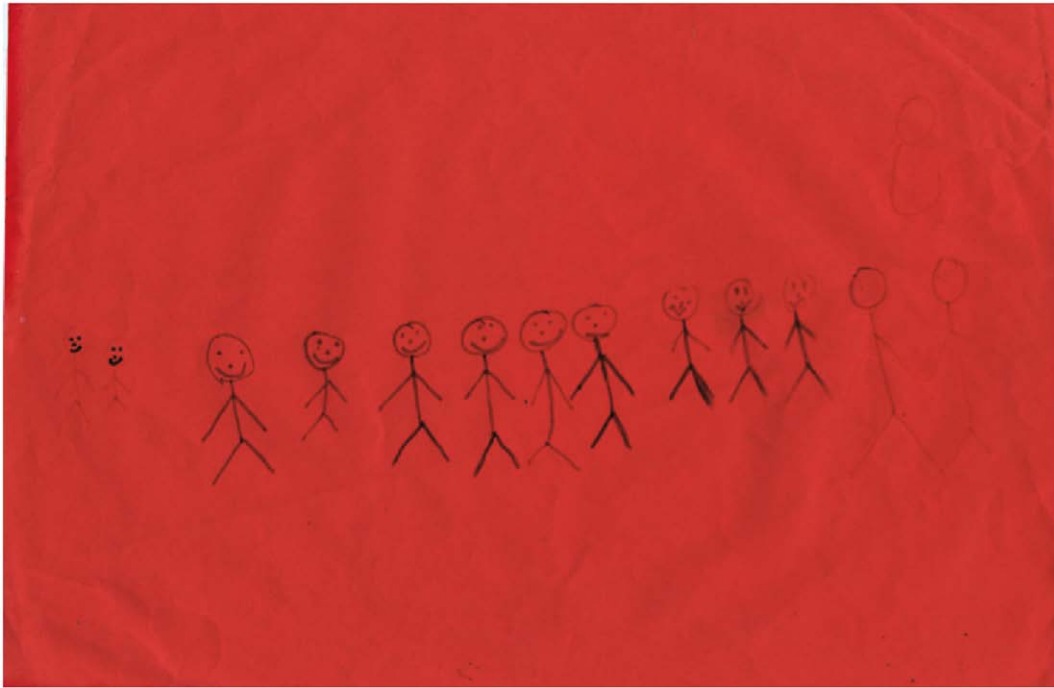
Tony - Age 10

Tony (age 10, Indigenous, in care). Tony chose to use a paper plate to decorate and paint.



Artwork 11 Untitled

Like Tom, he started by using red and blue paint straight from the palette to paint diagonal lines, which at times extended beyond the bounds of the plate. He then applied some black paint in the center of the plate and folded the plate in half, squashing the sides together. On opening up his plate, he proudly announced he was finished. Layering of a work can be indicative of something hidden. He proudly shared the work with the rest of the group although he did not know what to call it. The artwork was returned to him by mail. Making a work in such a way produces a mirror image. The process also involves making a gooey, unseen mess within the confines of the closed plate, with very little control over the finished product once the plate is opened. However the plate, in this instance also acts as a container for the mess.



Artwork 12 Family Drawing

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure visual clarity and confidentiality.

Tony created the second artwork during the one-on-one interview. He chose to use a piece of A4 red paper in landscape and a thin red texta. The combination of red-on-red makes some figures difficult to see but he did not indicate that this was an issue for him. Once he drew the figures, he proceeded to name them from left to right (blocked out) including naming his parents by their first names rather than using Mum and Dad. Tony and his brother Tom are placed as the fourth and fifth figures from the right. Center of the page he has placed his two oldest brothers and it was these two brothers with whom he expressed as wanting to have more contact. The lined-up figures take up the entire width of the page and he included all of his siblings with the parental figures appearing on the far right. They are larger than the other figures and drawn in a fainter colour, they have no faces but sway towards the other figures. Above them floats the armless, legless and faceless figure of their baby sister/cousin, with whom he has no contact.

Next to the figure of his mother are his youngest sister, Tom and himself. These three figures display the same facial features in that the mouths are in a V-shape and they are also placed further back on the page.

His two youngest siblings, with whom he has little to no contact, are placed to the far left and are the only figures that have green facial features.

Unlike his previous artwork, Tony showed little pride in this work and left it behind when he left the interview.

Mr. Lee's initial comment on sighting *Artwork 11*, was “*mirroring*” and asked about the sequence of how the artwork was made. He stated that:

“The energy of the artwork feels neglected and shunned. The self is hiding inside blackness. There is hope in that he used colours to express himself, then covered them up. He doesn't want to be seen or be known.”

Mr. Lee's initial impression of the family drawing above was “*camouflage, red on red.*” Mr. Lee then went on to add that the artist sees the two siblings on the end differently, that they all seem happy except for the parents and that he has no relationship with the floating figure above. He thought that this child would be in care, which he is.

Tony's artwork can also add another layer of understanding in terms of Tony's sense of identity and wellbeing. Mr. Lee's statement, that Tony “*is hiding inside blackness*”, is perhaps indicative of the sense of shame and anger he feels towards his father, which was also highlighted during the interview. Like Abbey, perhaps Tony also feels a need to hide the self in order to feel safe. Like the plate in *Artwork 11*, ‘Untitled’, Tony tried to contain his ‘messed-up’ and conflicting feelings, so it is no surprise that like his brother, his acting-out and aggressive behaviours are increasing. Tony's anger at his father and his wish to never see him again are reflected in his drawing where, prior to image enhancement the father figure was barely visible and faceless. The mother is given similar treatment in the drawing which is perhaps indicative of some ambivalence or repressed anger towards his mother.

Alice - Age 10

Alice (aged 10, Indigenous/Anglo, in care). Artwork was unavailable for filming.

Alice, although shy, chatted as she carefully created her artwork. Towards the end of creating her work she talked through the colours she was using. Alice chose white A4 paper in landscape and drew a pink heart with 'Mum' written in pink large letters in the centre. When the researcher asked her if they could photograph the drawing, returning it the following day to her, Alice said no and carried the work away with her to put away so she could give it to her foster mother.

Like her older half-sister Beth, who was also interviewed, trust and self-esteem appeared to be major issues for Alice. This was evidenced in her interactions and narrative during and after the interview, along with her interactions with her half-siblings as she seemed to distance herself from them.

Both the interview and the artwork revealed Alice's attachment to her foster mother and her ambivalent attachment to her natural mother. Alice had been in the placement from the age of three, which, given it has been her only placement, means Alice likely lived with her natural mother for longer than her siblings, who all had come into care as babies. Alice still holds a high level of insecurity as evidenced in her interview.

Alice's artwork, along with her need to protect the artwork, compliment the other data available about Alice. The deep fear of being "*taken away*" again and the thought of having to sever her strong attachment to her foster mother was voiced during the interview and as part of her art making process.

Kristy - Age 8



Artwork 13 Flag

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure confidentiality.

Kristy (aged 8, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care). Kristy spent the session next to her sister Kate and happily shared the resources with the other children during the initial art group. Kristy began by choosing an A3 sheet of white paper and creating a border in black texta. She then drew the map of Australia by memory. There is also a black border around the yellow centre circle. She knew how she wanted the work to look and was able to utilise the materials to this effect. She chose red and black paint and was careful not to exceed the drawn boundaries. The yellow centre was painted next and the gold glitter added and then the feathers.

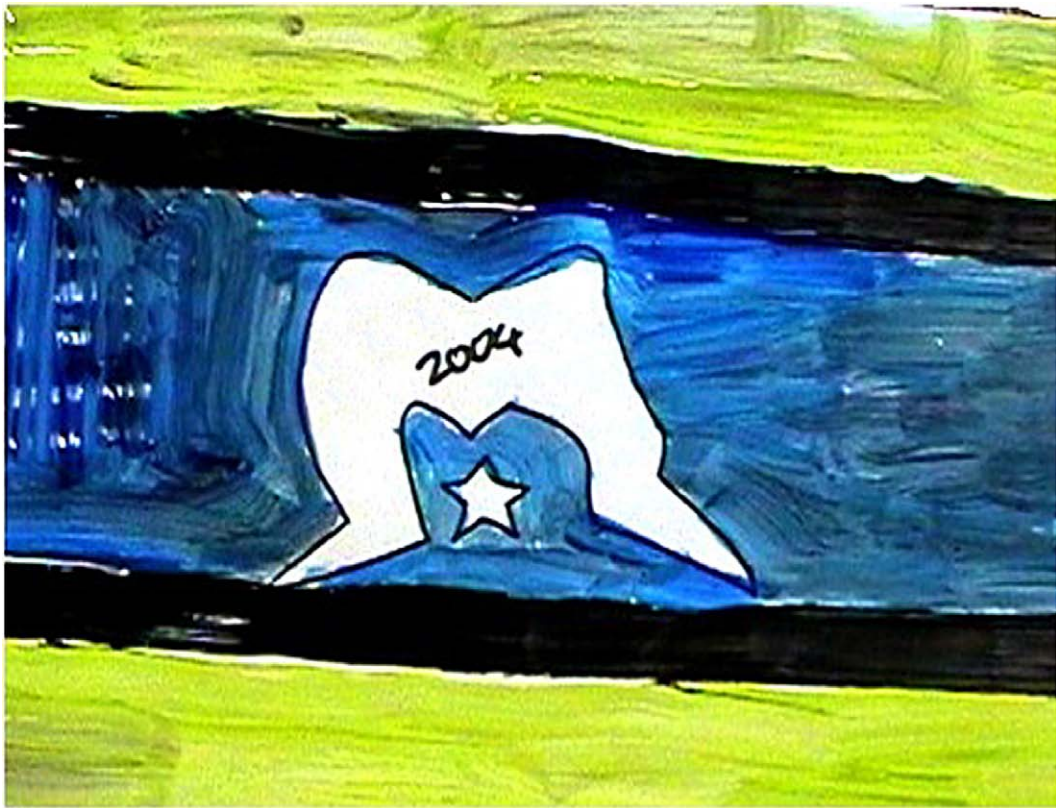
Kristy has transposed the Aboriginal flag onto the map of Australia, which clearly indicates her pride in her culture and she was able to work within the symbolic. The feathers also echo the flag in the placement of colour. Kristy was very proud of her work. Kristy showed a great deal of confidence in her use of the materials and choice of subject matter.

When Kristy was asked about her choice of colours during the interview she stated; “*I painted the flag!*” When this was further explored, Kristy was emphatic that the flag was part of her and talked of learning a lot about culture from her parents and her grandmother. The work also presents a good use of space and design.

Mr. Lee reacted with delight at Kristy’s artwork and stated that; “*This child was confident and able to control the materials.*” He felt that the order of the materials was important in their symbolism and that the order of the feathers was “*traditional*” to Aboriginal culture. Most obviously, he stated that she “*was proud to be Aboriginal.*” Mr. Lee was in no doubt that Kristy was Aboriginal and not in care.

Kristy’s artwork provides a visual indication of the importance of Aboriginal culture to her sense of self. The care and pride taken in the work are reflective of the pride she places in herself and her culture. Kristy displayed a high level of confidence in herself and her creativity as expressed in the art group and in the interview, which indicate a healthy sense of self.

Kate - Age 11



Artwork 14 Untitled

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure confidentiality.

Kate (aged 11, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care). *Artwork 14*, was created at the beginning of the art group. Interestingly, it represents a copy of the Torres Strait Islander flag, which is not representative of Kate's culture. Of interest is that she has added a triangle shape at the centre of the figure that does not exist in the flag design. Although proud of the work *Untitled*, the second work *Dreamcatcher*, took precedence for her. Kate began '*Untitled*', by drawing the centre figure in black texta and then applied the black, blue and green paint in that order. Kate completed the work and put it aside whilst she spent the majority of the rest of the session creating *Artwork 15*. There was very little mess made during the making of either of the works



Artwork 15 Dreamcatcher

Kate was the only participant in the art group to create a three dimensional work that was meant to be hung and be viewed from all sides. She began by using glittered pipe cleaners to create the outer circle of the model. She then used the string to create the centre design and tied on the feathers and added the glitter. During the interview Kate stated that her Grandmother had taught her how to make it.

Dreamcatchers originated from the Ojibwa (American Indian) culture which ‘is the inanimate word for the word spider or bawaajige nagwaagan meaning “dream snare” (and) is a handmade item based on willow hoop on which a loose net or web is woven. The dreamcatcher is then decorated with personal and sacred items such as feathers and beads (Wikipedia, Dreamcatcher, 2010). According to Densmore, infants were provided with protective charms. “*Spidenwebs*” hung on the hoop of a babies cradle. They consisted of wooden hoops approximately fifteen centimeters in diameter and were filled with imitation web made of fine yarn and coloured red. Two webs were on the hoop as it was said that they ‘caught any harm that might be in the air’ (Densmore, 1979, p. 113).

The popularisation and commercialisation of dreamcatchers sold in curio and esoteric shops all over Australia, could be said to represent a cultural appropriation. It is interesting to consider that as part of this research, when some Indigenous adults were asked to visualise how Aboriginal family could be diagrammatically represented, the spiderweb was often cited, as it adequately represented the interconnectedness and complex nature of the Aboriginal skin and clan systems.

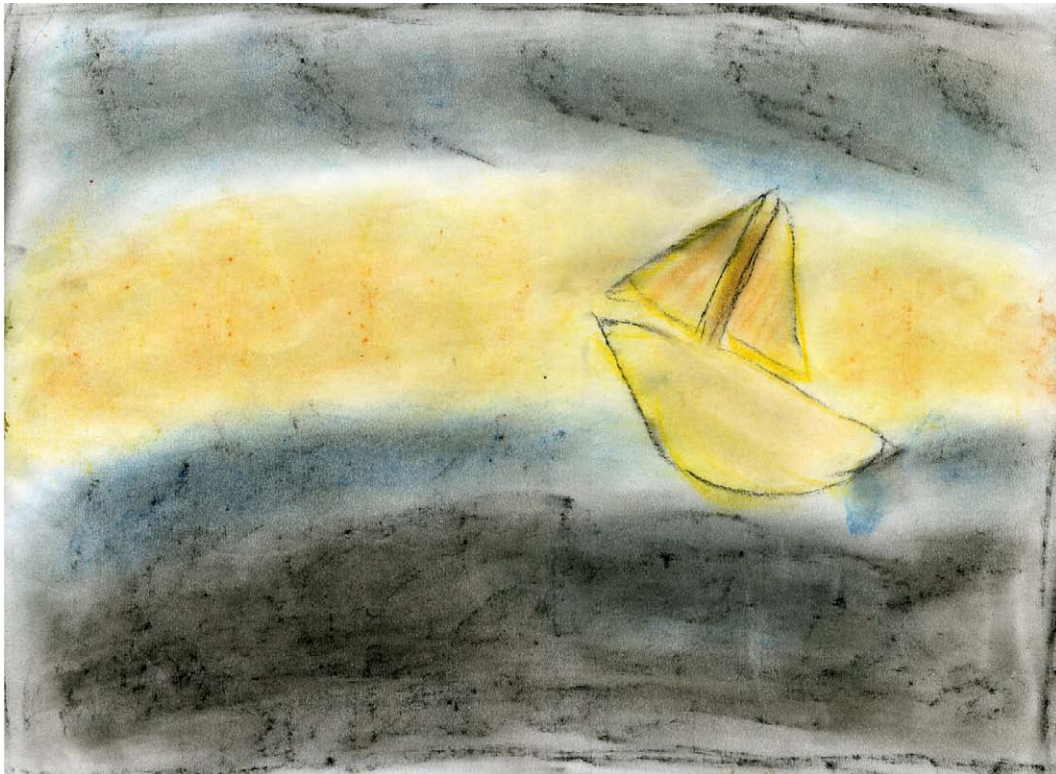
Kate's usage of the design and reappropriation into her own cultural context is not insignificant. Kate stated that her Grandmother taught her how to make it and she utilised the colours of the Aboriginal flag in her usage of the feathers as a 'sacred item'. Kate lives in an urban centre where there is easy access to such curios. Interestingly this lies in contrast to the kind of skills handed down by remote Aboriginal grandmothers in that there is usually a focus on traditional skills such as weaving and painting within the context of that particular family group.

Kate displayed a great deal of patience, mastery and confidence in her use of the materials and she was very proud of the results. Her work also displays an innovative use of what was available, in order to achieve her aim and confidence in being able to experiment to this end. Kate was able to leave the work with the researcher to dry and trusted that the work would be returned to her.

On viewing *Artwork 14*, Mr. Lee stated that; "*This child was in a good place.*" I was most interested to know what he thought of Kate's cultural context. He simply stated that she had "*cultural spirit.*" On viewing the photograph of Kate's '*Dreamcatcher*' his initial comment was that; "*Here is a child that is strong in wanting to know about culture.*" He went on to add; "*It's about catching dreams and a spider's web was used. In Aboriginal culture, women would wrap their finger in spiders webs to show status or level of law.*" Mr. Lee was certain this child was Aboriginal and not in care.

Kate's artworks and art process indeed provide evidence of Kate "*being in a good place*", as articulated by Mr. Lee. The artworks deepen our understanding of Kate's connection to culture and family. Kate was able to explore other cultures as in *Untitled*, whilst remaining strong in her own culture. The artwork '*Dreamcatcher*,' and the care and pride with which it was produced are indicative of a high level of self-esteem, which is congruent with other data collected during the interview. The artworks confirm that Kate held a strong sense of identity.

Lara - Age 12



Artwork 16 Storm at Sea/My Favourite Place

Lara (aged 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care). Lara began by stating she was going to draw her favourite place. On an A3 piece of white paper she began applying the yellow sand. Lara chose to use chalk pastels in two colours, black and yellow, which she smudged with her fingers. There is a heavy black border framing the drawing. Of the works Lara created, this is the only work where she utilised a clear boundary around the drawing, perhaps in this instance, it is her way of containing the storm. The work contradicts how she described her favourite place in her narrative. It is also worth noting that this was the only drawing created in a larger format. All the other works she created were produced on A4.

The picture displays a yacht on what looks to be a stormy night, sailing with the beach behind it. In contrast, the sea is an inky black, as the yacht appears to bounce off the crest of a wave. Furthermore, such a stormy night would likely produce junk or flotsam and jetsam washed up on the beach the following morning. Yet she states:

"I like the beach it doesn't have junk like sea-weed just nice crystal clear water."

Lara left little time to discuss the work further, as she proceeded to create her next work. I was thus unable to investigate further aspects, such as who was in the yacht and if they were safe.

Lara in fact created several artworks in quick succession. This work, like the others, she gifted to the interviewer.



Artwork 17 Sunset on the Beach

Before starting her second work, Lara announced she was going to draw a sunset on the beach. Whilst she was drawing this work she announced *“And my next drawing is going to be sun setting in the mountains.”*

For *Artwork 17*, Lara chose an A4 sheet of white paper and folded the paper at the top and bottom to create a small, oblong shape. Utilising blue and yellow acrylic paint and a thick paintbrush, she painted a yellow line and then a blue line with the yellow bleeding into the blue in some places. She then painted the sun created left of centre by mixing red and yellow on the paper. The orange sun is reflected in the water below. Lara chose greeny-blue and painted palm-tree-like shapes on either side of the page. Blue and purple glitter was added to the sky and green glitter added to the two palm trees on either side of the work. Lara then wrote *“To Michelle”* around the sun and gifted the work to the interviewer.



Artwork 18 !!The Setting in the Mountain!!

Lara's third picture (*Artwork 18*) is of another natural setting. Lara started by creating the outline of the mountains in light green crayon. The configuration of the sun between the mountains is a common image drawn by children, except that in this case these mountains appear rocky, uneven and very high, which could be a reference to Eungella which is a near by mountain range. The mountains reach up into the sky and take up the bulk of the space on the page. Lara combined patches of dark and light green in a sideways motion.

She then overlayed this with tan and two tiny patches of deep red one on each mountain. On the right hand side sits a box shape at the bottom of the mountain in which she signed her name (which has been digitally removed). She then chose an orange crayon and drew the sun in the centre of the mountains and overlayed with red crayon.

Lara utilised the green, red and orange crayons to title it. The title reads; '!!*The Setting in the mountain!!*' These exclamation marks are drawn in orange. There is also two lots of orange marks at the beginning and under the title. Immediately after completing this work, which was created in silence, Lara went on to create the next work, leaving no time to talk about this work. This work was gifted to the researcher.



Artwork 19 Animals in the Zoo

Artworks 15 -19 were works Lara created before she was interviewed. This final work, *Artwork 19*, was created out of blue glitter, foam animals and trees, feathers and texta. All the animals, except the red monkey, face to the right of the page. The red monkey faces the pink monkey and green feathers surround the pink monkey. The red monkey hangs cushioned in strong coloured feathers (deep pink and red) however, beneath the second red feather lurks a green lion. It is interesting to note Lara's use of green here, as in later works Lara went on to explain that green was her personal colour. If the red monkey should fall from the canopy, the hidden green lion lies in waiting. On the bottom row, the yellow lion remains trapped or surrounded by yellow feathers. A red elephant appears to hide behind the yellow feather that encloses the yellow lion in watch. Two smaller figures of trees and a giraffe were added to the centre, these are of the same pale blue colour.



Artwork 20 The Feelings in my Heart

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure confidentiality.

Lara chose to use texta, glitter, glitter studs and feathers to create *Artwork 20*. According to Lara, the heart-shape was drawn first in grey texta and segmented in black. Lara then chose each colour to fill in the shapes as she talked of these being all of her colours. Finally she added the glitter and the feathers.

Lara spoke of considering herself to be “*mean and green.*” The interviewer asked her why green. “*Because basically of all my colours, my personal colour is green because I don’t know.*”

Lara went on to state that it wasn’t because she liked it as she had announced her favourite colour was blue. The heart is segmented into fifteen pieces, with different shades of blue and green occupying six segments. The blue and green segments are always attached, with the green invariably lying on the bottom.

The point of the heart, much like an upside down mountain peak with similar colours to the mountains in *Artwork 18*, is also in different shades of green, which is interesting in light of Lara's identification with green and the meaner side of herself. The top of the love-heart is dominated by red and orange. Blue features at the centre of the heart. Lara couldn't name the segments and simply stated they are "all jumbled up."

It is interesting to note Lara's placement of colour in light of her symbolic use and identification with certain colours. In this work, the blue segments that represent her favourite colour, interlink with the "mean", green side of herself, which it might be hypothesised, could represent Lara's internal struggle with this side of herself. That in *Artwork 18*, the pink monkey is surrounded by green could imply evil intent by the pink monkey, which is reiterated in the use of green for the hidden lion. Had Lara used green feathers along the length of the canopy one could perhaps surmise that they merely represent the canopy, however, the use of the pink feather at the end along with her symbolic use of colour could indicate otherwise.



Artwork 21 My Personality

As we began talking about identity and what it meant for her, Lara went on to create *Artwork 21*. She made the black one first, utilising a plastic spoon, cardboard, glue, feathers, google eyes, glitter studs and glitter. On completion she held it up and stated, "That's my personality."

Lara was asked to explain “my personality” and she stated; “I’d say happy, I got big eyes ...cos Dad (foster) says you better not use those eyes for your tummy and my favourite colour is blue.” Of interest is Lara’s choice of black for the face, particularly in light of her next addition to this work. She used a blue feather for the hair. She then went off to show her foster father but quickly returned and stated: “That’s a boy (holding up the artwork) and I’m going to make a girl for it.” Lara returned some time later holding up both the pink and black figures and announced:

“That’s my inner personal friend... she’s like a movie star... see her eyes and umm yeah her name’s Vicki. Vicki the movie star, she’s happy. My inner person’s name is Fred (holding up the black figure) he’s happy now but he was sad because he didn’t have a friend but now he’s got a friend called Vicki.”

This work achieves a sense of balance in its representation of male and female. Fred remained sad until the very flamboyant Vicki was created.

Lara was asked what she would say to Vicki and vice-versa. Vicki would introduce herself, as Lara stated they would not know each other and Lara would have to explain;

“I would need to tell her that I created you and I made you how you feel.”

Of note is that her “personality” and her “inner personal friend” do not know each other and Lara, like a third person needs to introduce them. There is a degree of omnipotence in this statement.

Lara was asked how does she (Vicki) feel?

“Umm happy, lucky, scared nope not scared, smiley and lucky cos she’s got a top hat with feathers sticking out of it.”

Vicki represents a part of Lara that can feel optimistic, an indication that Lara has a level of resilience but perhaps needs to get to know this side of herself better.

It is interesting that on Fred, she used the spoon handle side down, bending Fred's face, which gives a slightly more animated effect to the google eyes, giving then a downward cast. In contrast, on Vicki the spoon is used spoon side down, giving a body-like effect to the flamboyant head. She also chose a bigger piece of card for Vicki's head. Fred appears to look down, whilst Vicki stares out at the audience. Fred appears introverted when placed next to Vicki.

Of the six works created by Lara, four of them depicted nature in some way. Lara's displayed a high level of confidence in her use of the art materials and was able to experiment with and mix media in order to produce the results she was after. She was also able to utilise metaphor and symbolism.

Mr. Lee made little comment when he viewed the first works Lara made but by the time he had viewed *Artwork 17* and *18* he stated:

"This child has Aboriginality running through her artwork. She gifted the works to you, so she was sharing the self with the researcher. She loves nature. But I think she is also Anglo. She is very talented in her use of media."

Lara we know from the data available is one of the children in the research who were unaware of their Aboriginal heritage but is Aboriginal/Anglo by birth.

Mr. Lee's observation of Lara *'sharing herself'* with the researcher should not go unnoticed. Lara created six artworks in total, each providing further insight into Lara's sense of identity. Certainly there are incongruencies such as her narrative about her favorite place being calm and then depicting this place as stormy and dark as in *'Storm at Sea'*. The sun in *'Sun setting in the Sea'*, belies that fact that Lara has always lived on the East Coast of Australia and has not visited the West Coast, nor travelled overseas. As a sequence Lara starts off by showing the researcher her favourite place, whilst depicting the inherent danger. *Animals in the Zoo*, again depicts a natural space seemingly fraught with hidden danger. Like a number of participants Lara had issues with trust and clearly stated during her interview that she did not trust anyone. It appears Lara was able, via *Artwork 20* and *21*, to transcend her mistrust by visually showing the researcher how she feels and the different sides of her personality.

Lara was asked, when discussing The ‘*Feelings in my Heart*’, what the segments meant in terms of her feelings. Lara could not name the segments but simply stated that they “*were all jumbled up*” which perhaps is indicative of her jumbled up feelings. Lara had recently returned from a trial of living back with her foster mother and her new family, which included a new partner and adult children. The relationship between Lara and her foster mother had become highly fraught and again Lara was faced with feelings of betrayal and rejection by her foster mother, as she was sent back to live with her foster father. The likelihood of being sent to boarding school and her difficult relationship with her foster-sister may have also added to the “*jumbledness*.”

Mary - Age 12

Mary (aged 12, Indigenous/Anglo, in care) spent the workshop at one end of the table, separating herself from the other children present. Whilst creating her artwork she was very focussed. She chose to use a bright blue A4 sheet of paper and paint. She proceeded by drawing a circle in pink and then cut around it. She chose a pale pink crayon segmenting the circle. She then began to paint the segments. Although the colours she chose were bright, the amount of water she applied left the colours watery and muted. She sat looking at her completed work for some time and then picked up a piece of paper and smudged all the colours in the work together.

Mary was invited to share her artwork with the rest of the group if she wished but she denied that she had made the work and proceeded to scrunch it up and throw it in the bin. Mary was asked during her interview some weeks later about the artwork but she stated that she did not want it and that she did not remember if she threw it away.



Artwork 22 Untitled

Artwork 22, was created during the one-on-one interview. Mary chose an A3 piece of white paper and crayons. She began drawing early in the interview and drew in silence for some time. When asked about the drawing she did not wish to elaborate, said it was stupid and left it at the interview site.

The work was produced very methodically choosing one crayon at a time. She began by choosing a blue crayon and drawing a blue band, she then drew the blue boundary around the rainbow putting the crayon back in its holder, which she did with each crayon she chose. She then added the yellow band, the green and so on. She added the bottom band last and then proceeded to go through each colour again in turn adding the stars in lines. The orange and red bands contain the most stars. The swirly blue/purple cloud and purple stars were added last.

The total effect is a rather large, clumsy rainbow like form, with a swirling storm on the top right hand side. It appears that Mary's 'rainbow' occurs at night. This kind of repetitive process is not uncommon in traumatised children and can provide a means of working through the trauma in a safe way.

Such a process often culminates in either complete destruction or a level of denial of the object made. As discussed earlier, what happens to the artwork upon completion is an important part of the art making process.⁴⁶

It was clear from Mary's dialogue and body language that she was struggling with recent grief and loss that was compounding her trauma. Mary's flat affect was mirrored in her responses. The only important things to her were the teddy bears her deceased mother gave her, in fact nothing in her current circumstances (apart from the cat which she was not able to keep), warranted keeping. Mary could articulate what identity meant but could not apply it to herself.

"I don't know (what identity means), who you are, what your name is and what you are like." When asked about her own identity she simply stated *"I don't know"* and when asked to describe herself she stated, *"I have a big family, I don't know."*

Mary's artwork was another work that caused Mr. Lee some concern. He remarked that, *"The colourful becomes overwhelming."* I explained to Mr. Lee the process around the initial work she made and he replied, *"She is keeping the self safe by destroying and denying. She is so overwhelmed that denial for her feels necessary."* Mr. Lee stated that she would be a child in care but made no comment as to her culture.

Mary's behaviour during the art group mirror those of her sister Tracey's. Like Tracey she segregated herself from the group, and like Tracey she destroyed her art work and discarded it and later denying that she had made the work. The second work 'Untitled', she described as *"stupid"* was also discarded. Mary's need for denial, flat affect and bouts of anger as described by her carer, are all indicative of a depressed and traumatised child. Mary, understandably, feels emotionally overwhelmed, as undoubtedly the impending relocation has had a destabilising influence for Mary.

It is unknown how much the foster carers' violent relationship and the subsequent separation have effected Mary's emotional state. It is of note that Mary's carer was deeply concerned about Mary's violent behaviours and that these behaviours were increasing in both severity and frequency.

46 In my many years as a trauma therapist I often observed the ritualisation of this process, whereby a ceremony is formulated around the destruction of the work. This process can be cathartic for the client in releasing the trauma.

Mary's use of colour in the artworks is also of interest. In the initial work that she destroyed, Mary chose to use bright coloured paint but watered them down so much that they become completely muted.

In Mary's second work *Untitled*, the colour, patterning and the shape of the 'rainbow' become overwhelming on the page. In both works Mary employed repetitive movements, which, for Mary, may provide some sense of control. Like Tracey, it is a concern that Mary has disengaged from counselling at a time perhaps when she is most in need. It was clear from her interview that Mary was grieving as she faces yet another loss, that of the cat, her friends and her school, which up to this point were likely the only stable things in Mary's life during the turbulent times of her carer's relationship breakdown.

Mary's desire to change her family name to the name of someone she has never met, (her older half-brother's father), are also a concern in terms of her identity.

Summer - Age 13



Artwork 23 Mr. Sun

Summer (aged 13, Afro/Anglo, not in care). Summer created *Artwork 23* during the interview. She chose an A2 sheet of paper and a HB lead pencil. She started by drawing the dog in the centre of the page. Next, she drew the figure of herself to the left. She was wearing her new school uniform at the time and she copied the insignia from it in detail. The figure of herself, is larger than the other figures. Next, she drew her mother on the right-hand side but she struggled to get the torso correct, rubbing it out and redrawing it several times. Lastly, she drew the sun and named the drawing 'Mr. Sun'. The dog's head is quite detailed. The self-portrait extends beyond the page and all figures stare out to the viewer.

The arm of her self-figure extends beyond the page and both the mother figure and the dog remain contained within. The sun drawn last, wears glasses and pokes its tongue out at the audience.

During the interview, Summer cited her dog and her Mum as being most important to her, so it is not surprising that her artwork is dominated by these figures. Summer's reality of having just moved to a new country with no other supports, is visually displayed by the three figures along with the sun, which takes up the entire space. Summer displays difference from her mother by drawing herself with tight curls, which alludes to her African heritage. Summer was asked what each of the figures would say to each other.

<i>What would Mum say to Mr. Sun?</i>	<i>"Please keep my dog happy."</i>
<i>What would Mum say to Summer?</i>	<i>"Always be a good girl."</i>
<i>What would Summer say to Mum?</i>	<i>"I love you."</i>
<i>What would Mr. Sun say to Summer?</i>	<i>"I'm going to make your day happy."</i>
<i>What would Mr. Sun say to Mum?</i>	<i>"I will guide you for today."</i>
<i>What would Mr. Sun say to T (the dog)?</i>	<i>"I'll find you a new friend."</i>
<i>What would Summer say to T?</i>	<i>"I love you too."</i>
<i>T to Summer?</i>	<i>"Woof, woof."</i>

Mr. Sun takes on the role of an omnipresent force that can provide happiness and guidance. Mr. Sun is asked by the mother to keep the dog happy and Mr. Sun agrees to provide her with guidance. Mr. Sun agrees to make Summer's day happy and provide a new friend for the dog. It is of interest that Summer expresses her love for both the dog and her mother. The dog replies that he loves her too, yet the mother's dialogue to Summer is about reminding her to *"be a good girl."* Even in her self-description the dog comes first:

"I'd say I've got a dog and I live with my Mum and, my Dad lives in England and I have lots of friends."

Summer was asked what it was like leaving everything behind and coming to a new country. She replied: *"scary and I didn't want to leave my friends and my dog, I wouldn't see him for a long time. I thought I would be very scared because I don't like planes twenty-two hours and, I was worried about starting school up here. Different place, different people and I got use to it and I really like it up here."*

Given that Summer had already attended twelve schools (only one at this stage in Australia) at the time of the interview, the level of optimism and resilience she displays in both her artwork and her dialogue is quite high. Summer and her mother, some years later, again lived in the same community as the researcher, hence I would bump into Summer from time to time and I was able to attain impromptu news of how she was faring. It is appropriate to reiterate here, that at the time of writing this thesis some years later, after attending another five schools and dropping out several times, Summer no longer attends school and is neither training in an occupation or working. Summer and her mother have moved interstate twice since this interview and she was experiencing bullying at each school she attended.

It was explained to Mr. Lee that this work was created on an A2 sheet of paper in order to give him some notion of the size of the work. He commented on how *"strong"* the image of the dog and the uniform was and that these aspects are important to the child. *"Mum is there, she has support."* He made no comment as to her cultural heritage but commented that he felt she was not in care.

Summer's artwork '*Mr. Sun*', spoke of hope and optimism as she projects into the future a happy time when her dog is out of quarantine. To the knowledge of the researcher, Summer was the only child in the research who was not in care and had been witness to severe domestic violence and the subsequent relocations in order to flee from Summer's father who was the perpetrator. This fresh start in a new country perhaps gave Summer hope of brighter things to come. What Summer's case does demonstrate is the impact of attending multiple schools and relocations. This lack of stability made it difficult for Summer to form long-term connections. Summer was also separated from any extended family, which meant her mother was coping with such a huge life change as immigrating, with very little supports available.

Andrew - Age 14

Andrew (age 14, Aboriginal/Anglo, in care).



Artwork 24 Twin Hills

Note: This picture has been digitally enhanced in order to ensure confidentiality. The original is much lighter and is enhanced in order to aid clarity for the viewer.

Andrew initially had trouble deciding what to draw:

“Hmmm...I know what I am going to draw now! I am going to draw my house but it has to be perfect.”

He then found a photograph of a house and he started to draw it but soon abandoned the idea because:

“I can’t get it perfect.” He then began to draw something else in silence.

Andrew chose a HB lead pencil and A3 paper. He signed and named it proudly showing it to the interviewer.

“It’s actually this place called Twin Hills. See... we have the Targeeb tree on the hill (points to the picture). Then you’ve got your house on the other surrounded by cane and everything and like you said with doodling, it just comes to you. I didn’t think about what to draw and it just came out. It reminds me of my old farmhouse when I was a little youngster, a little. We had to eventually end up selling it. It had stables, horses, we had everything!”

Andrew took great care in the execution of his drawing, precisely lining up the barbs and cane stalks. The number three features in the drawing, with three barbs on each of the three wires, three windows on the house and twelve posts on the fence. The two hills are separated and bulbous, with a breast like appearance. The tree has a rather large hole and a tyre hangs off the tree gallows-like. The picture’s flattened perspective gives little sense of distance. Andrew chose to leave the elements without shade or colours, heightening further the one-dimensional quality of the work.

The foster father came in during the interview and Andrew was eager to show him the drawing. Below describes the interaction regarding one of the items on the drawing.

Andrew, *“They are called Twin Hills.”*

FD, *“And there’s our fence. Why the barbed wire?”* Andrew, *“Yep, Hmm I don’t know.”*

Interviewer, “ *Did you have barbed wire when you were on the farm?*”

FD, “...*Hmmm...Yeah we did! Did you remember that?*”

Andrew, “*Yep, I remember the barbed wire on the fence eh!*”

This interplay between the foster father and Andrew displayed an interesting dynamic. Andrew made a point of showing the work to his foster father. ‘*Twin-Hills*’ is both the name of the drawing and the name of the family property where they lived prior to the divorce of the foster parents. The father questioned the insertion of the barbed wire and, at first Andrew complies by changing his mind and not remembering until the foster father remembers. The barbed wire is drawn in darker lead than the rest of the drawing, is very ordered and dominates the foreground, with the house towering high in the landscape. Of note, is that although the house is drawn in the generic western style as mentioned earlier, there is no path to the house for the viewer to visually access the way to the house. The fence extends the entire length of the drawing.

The viewer stands on the other side of the fence with no gate or access into the property.

That he chose to draw the house they shared when they were an intact family in such a controlled way, may be indicative of his feelings of not being able to control the situation during the break-up, along with a harking back to happier times.



Artwork 25 Self Portrait

Andrew decided to try his hand at a self-portrait;

“It would be very interesting for me. All I have to do is look in the mirror and just draw it. Without the mirror, that would be hard but I reckon I could do it. OK, I’ll give it a try but I don’t think it will be exact...OK I’ll try it!”

“ I’ll use pencil again and white paper...OK myself!”

Andrew returned a little while later with the drawing, *Artwork 25*. The head is drawn central to the paper and floats unattached to a body. Andrew used the A3 sheet in portrait format. Again the face appears somewhat flattened with big eyes that stare out to the viewer. The nose swings to the left of the face with large lips, which lend an Islander appearance to the face. The chin tends to bulge to one side.

Andrew's choice of art materials is again indicative of his need to control, which was confirmed in his interview within his dialogue about containing his anger. These anger management techniques were taught to him by a counsellor as a consequence of his reported aggressive behaviours by his foster mother, which occurred just after his foster parents marriage broke up and he and Lara moved to live with their foster mother and her new partner.

The disembodied head is perhaps indicative of how Andrew copes with sadness and anger. The behavioural management techniques described by Andrew are cognitively driven, as opposed to more physical or psychodynamic strategies. Of concern is Andrew's tendency to "hold it in."

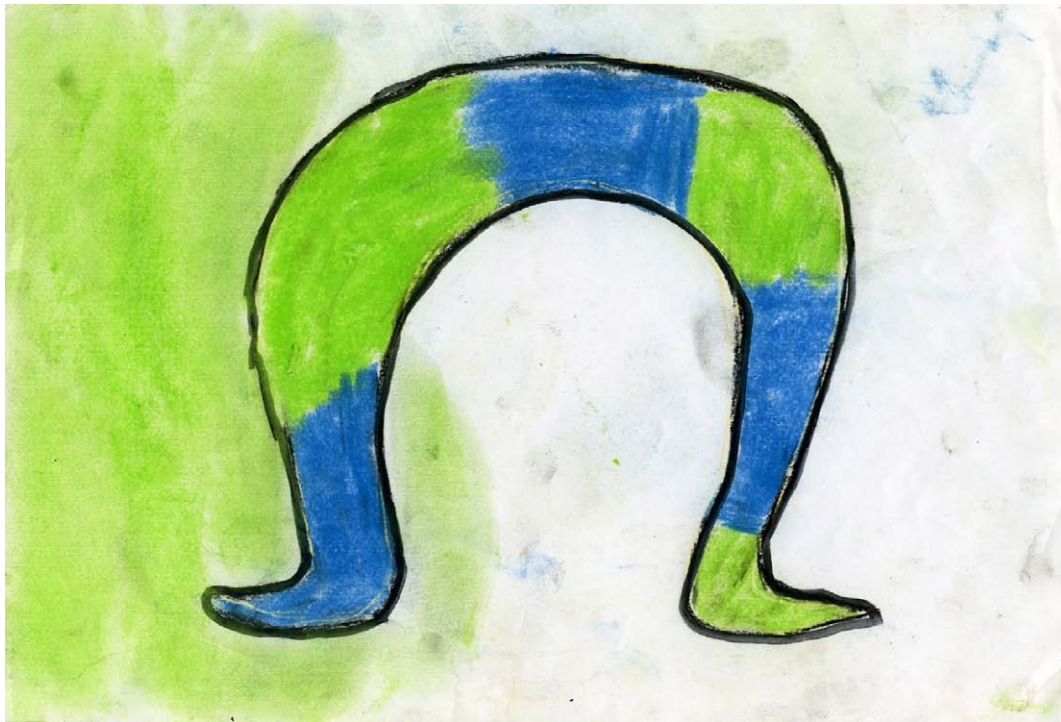
"If my foster brother says something bad to me I hold it in, I don't forget about it but he thinks I do."

In regards to *Artwork 24*, Mr. Lee commented at the "breast-like" nature of the hills and that this boy was "missing his mother" he also noticed that "the trees have no leaves." On viewing Andrew's self portrait Mr. Lee commented on the serious expression and that the detail given to the hair was of interest. He asked about the child's hair and when I confirmed that he was in fact blonde he stated, "you wouldn't know he was blond." He then commented that he thought, "There might be some Aboriginality there."

Like his half-sister Lara and Alice, Andrew remains unaware of his Aboriginality.

Andrew's artworks help further develop our understanding of some of the struggles Andrew was facing. Mr. Lee's comment that "he was missing his mother" was interesting in that, like Lara, he has struggled to come to terms with his foster mother's relocation and her subsequent perceived rejection of him. His need to control and how he controls his emotions were also present in his process of artmaking. *Artwork 25*, 'Self Portrait', is a visual representation of this. Andrew's happy demeanor during the interview was not replicated in either of his artworks. *Artwork 24*, 'Twin Hills', there is no colour, no inhabitants and remains just an outline. A house on a hill with no entry point. Likewise, *Artwork 25*, 'Self Portrait' is in my opinion, somewhat somber and un-emotive.

Dan - Age 14



Artwork 26 Kangaroo-Jack

During the initial part of the interview Dan (age 14, Indigenous, in care) showed me an art book with pencil drawings of dragons of which he had drawn and seemed proud of, yet was unable to accept praise. He said that he would like to create an artwork. Dan chose a white A4 sheet of paper and chalk pastels. There was a Torres Strait Islander flag drawing on the wall (as his foster carer is Torres Strait Islander) and he began copying it. He then stopped drawing and asked me to draw the outline for him because he stated that he couldn't do it and he needed a lot of encouragement before he attempted to draw it. The figure is drawn without the dips and star shape of the flag. He then tried to convince the researcher to draw some flowers because he *"couldn't do it."* The researcher showed him some techniques in the hope that he may take encouragement from it, but instead he continued to decline and stated, *"I'm not doing that."*

He returned his attention to his original flag drawing and vigorously applied the pastel colours to the figure. He stated that he did not want the picture returned to him. At first he titled the picture *Jo-Jo* then *Jandiana* and finally decided on *'Kangaroo-Jack'*.

The artwork appears unfinished, smudged and crumpled. Unlike the flag he was copying, the figure, which is usually white, is smudged with sections of blue and green colour. One side of the figure is drawn larger than the other, giving it an uneven appearance. A large section on the left hand side of the drawing is smudged with green. Dan's lack of self-esteem was demonstrated in his lack of confidence in his own abilities and indeed within the artwork and his reaction to it.

On sighting this work Mr. Lee commented, *"this child does not know his foundation."* He asked for some details in how the work was made and stated that; *"The Torres Strait Islander symbol of the headdress is incomplete. He is looking for his identity. He has issues with his identity, it is like he stopped half way and thought, 'it's not me'! This is an Indigenous boy I would say in care."*

Mr. Lee's comments certainly concur with what we know from other data sources about Dan's sense of identity. Dan was unable to articulate what culture he was from and remained confused as to why he cannot return to his mother's home. His lack of knowing his foundation are visually demonstrated in the figure of the floating, unfinished headdress in *Artwork 26*, that was then renamed several times and discarded.

Beth - Age 15

Beth (aged 15, Indigenous/Anglo, in care) began by trying to explain her family structure via a genogram. She asked herself, *"which one I should start first?"* then stated *"I'll do the easy one"* and she proceeded to draw her family of origin.

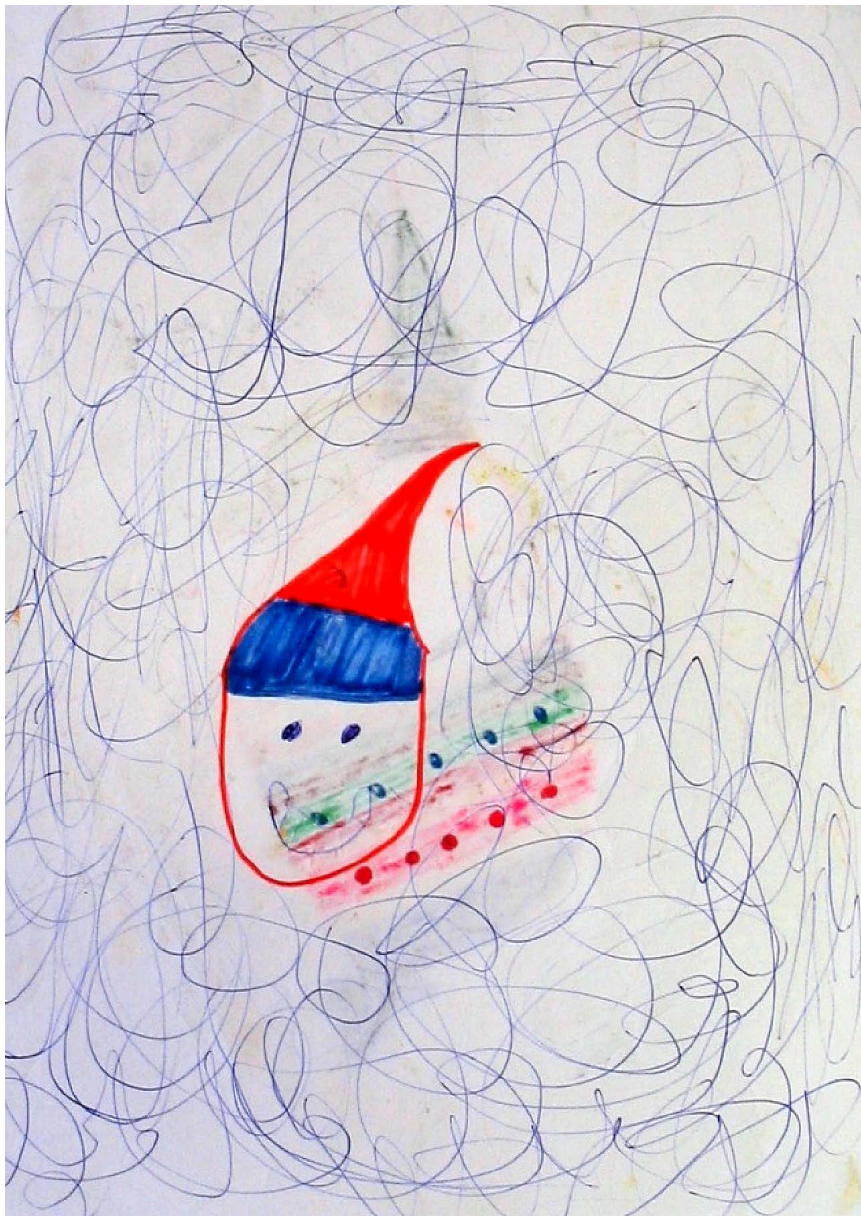
She started by naming and drawing a box for each character. *"Hmm Mum, Leanne,... Craig and then I'll put Craig here"* drawing a box to the left of Leanne's box, *"and put Steven there"* placing a box to the right of Leanne's. In order to gain clarification I asked who Steven was. *"That's Andrew's and Lara's father and Craig is my dad."* She then went on to say that she had some limited contact with Steven and with Leanne but *"not Craig."* Beth began to cry as she stated *"I haven't seen Craig for 13 years."* This became a recurring theme throughout the interview with statements such as; *"Like Craig not being there for me"* and *"my real Dad hasn't been there for me."*

Each time she would cry she was asked if she would like the interview stopped at which she would state that she wished to continue. During the interview she spoke about feeling so sad and angry, she stated that she was seeing a counsellor weekly, but this had ceased due to her counsellor being unavailable because *“she has too many clients”* and how she really missed this contact because *“it was good to talk about things that I thought were my fault.”* She went on to say that she had been really miserable last year and having the counsellor there weekly *“helped me through everything.”*

Beth continued her family genogram by adding Peter, who is her mother’s current partner. Omitted from the drawing was her two year old baby brother whom she later referred to as, *“being Peter’s”* and then added her half-brother and sisters.

She then proceeded to do the same for her foster family. *“Hmm... put Mum (her foster mother) down”* as she proceeded to draw a circle. *“Then Reece, then there’s like my foster Dad Will.”* She then proceeded to explain that Reece and Kay her foster mum, were divorced and her new partner was Will. She called Reece Dad and spoke of ambivalent feelings towards Will. It was evident in the interview that Beth held highly ambivalent feelings towards her birth parents, feeling abandoned by both of them. The recent situation with Reece has led to a resurfacing of these feelings of abandonment by her father. Beth has internalised many of these feelings, which has resulted in feelings of depression and the impulse to self-harm.

These drawings were completed after the interview and presented to the interviewer the following day. When asked about both drawings she said that *“it started off as a tear drop but I couldn’t draw one so I doodled.”*



Artwork 27 Tear Drop 1

Artwork 27, Tear Drop 1, shows the first ‘tear-drop’ that then becomes a head that floats in left-of-centre space amid a turbulent scribble in biro. The tear drop wears a smile which, although contradictory to the subject matter is perhaps indicative of the smile Beth wears to cover her underlying sadness.

The tear drop becomes a disembodied head, with a beanie like hat. It sits completely surrounded by the turbulent marks that surround it. Such a scribble would have demanded a level of energy and an abandonment of control, although it is worth

noting that the scribble in the main, remains well contained within the page. Of note is that the smile becomes hidden with the imposition of the work on the other side of the page. This initial work remained un-named, as attention was drawn to the second image (*Artwork 28*). *Artwork 28* was drawn on the other side of the same page as *Artwork 27*. That the image was flipped in order to overlay another image on the other side of the page, would suggest that *Artwork 27* may represent those split-off feelings of anger and sadness.



Artwork 28 Tear Drop 2

For *Artwork 28*, Beth chose to use text and the tear drop takes on the form of a spinning top. She asked her siblings to name the drawing. Upon observation of the artwork, the figure floats in space alone, displays different coloured eyes and wears a plastered smile. Like Dan, Beth's lack of confidence and self-esteem were evidenced in both the dialogue and the art-making process. Reading both works as one, reflects Beth's feelings of overwhelming sadness and anger and her attempts to cover up her feelings with a smile, even though like a spinning top she may feel things are out of control.

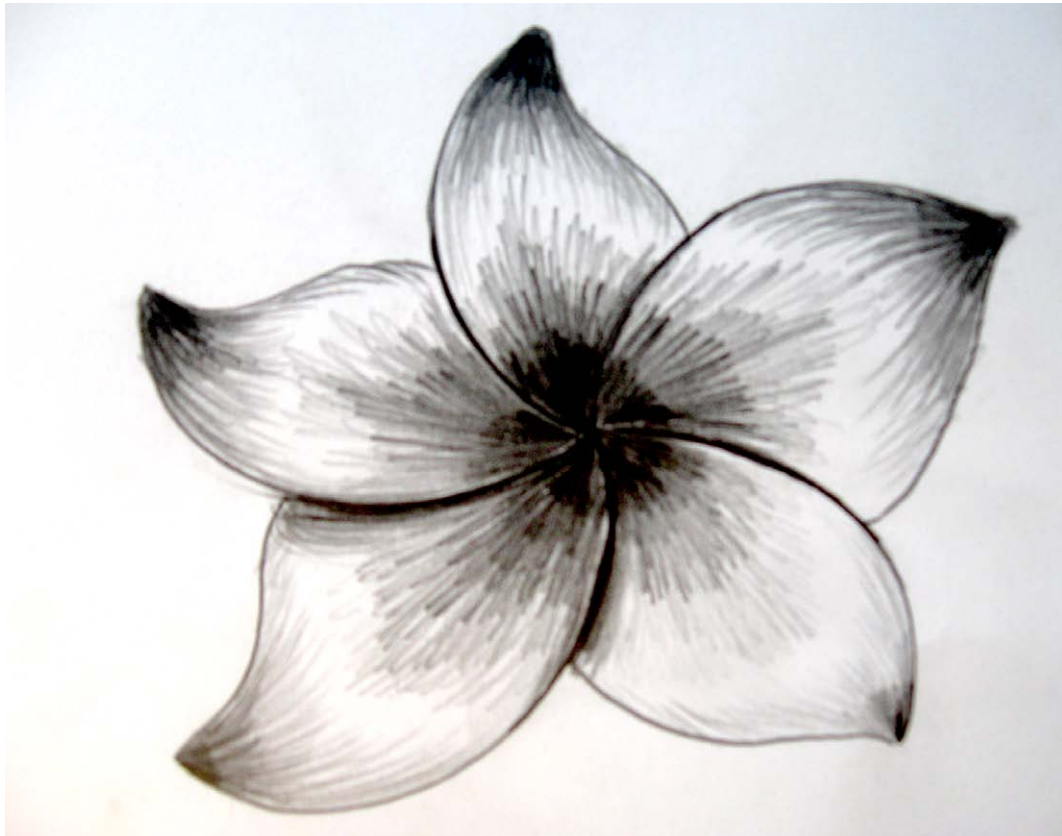
On showing these works to Mr. Lee, he stated that; *"Everything is done on the slant. It is unbalanced. There is a hidden smile, she blames herself, she needs to hide. There is lots of confusion. The smile isn't real."*

For Beth the deep sadness and anger she feels along with the need to mask these feelings comes to the fore in her artwork. Like her half-brother Andrew, Beth needs to control her anger and sadness as depicted by the scribbles, which she does by turning over the page and plastering on a smile. Beth is also struggling with the breakup of her foster carer's relationship, whilst coming to terms with her foster mother's new relationship and the altered foster family dynamics that have ensued. Beth's lack of trust, lack of connection and lack of a sense of identity are confirmed in her artwork. That she chose to represent herself as a tear drop she *"could not draw"* is not insignificant and is indicative of the sadness inside that at times overwhelms her. Beth's complete denial of her Aboriginal heritage is perhaps connected to the maternal relationship, thus rejecting this side of the self fulfills the need to reject her mother, whom she does not trust.

Nelly - Age 16

Nelly (age 16, Indigenous/Anglo, not in care).

Nelly chose an A2 sheet of thick white paper, which she carefully folded twice to produce an A4 size sheet. This gave the work a sturdy base, with the thickness of cardboard to support it. She then selected a variety of lead pencils, mainly in the B range. She was very focused during the execution of the drawing and was very proud of the results of her work. Nelly was able to utilise shading in order to give perspective and tactility. She explained that the Frangipani flower was her family totem. The flower shape takes up the entire page to which it is centrally placed. Nelly chose to gift the work to the researcher.



Artwork 29 Frangipani Totem

Nelly displayed a high level of confidence in both choosing what to draw and in the use of the art materials. Nelly was able to utilise subtle shading in her work, giving the flower perspective and depth. The flower sits slightly right of the centre of the page.

She began by drawing the outline and then began shading from the centre of the flower out. Lastly, she shaded the tips of the petals. Nelly chatted freely while she was intently drawing and discussed her culture and what it meant to her.

Mr. Lee commented that this work spoke for itself in the meaning of the totem and the way in which it was executed. *“She is proud of her culture and heritage.”*

Nelly’s artwork ‘*Frangipani Totem*’, speak to the viewer of a deep sense of pride. The care with which the work was produced and the pride Nelly displayed upon completing the artwork are indicative of a healthy sense of self and connection.

Discussion

The approach taken in interpreting the artwork for both the researcher and Mr. Lee shared a number of similarities. Mr. Lee’s approach was one of “feeling” into the artwork without prior knowledge of the art making process nor the specificity of the child. This differed from the researchers position.

Mr. Lee was able to make observations such as the “gleeful “nature of Robby and Heidi’s artwork as opposed to the distress he felt when viewing Tracey’s, Mary’s, Dan’s and Tony’s work

By placing the artwork in succession of completion, Mr. Lee was able to create a pictorial narrative in much the same way such a tool is used in arts therapy. Mr. Lee also analysed relational aspects of the pictorial elements within the artworks in the same way as the researcher, which suggests that there may be commonalities in how we interpret pictures.

Like other Indigenous people mentioned in this research Mr. Lee also equated distress in the artist with distress in their spirit. Mr. Lee was able to articulate the symbolic nature of the artwork, such as Abbey’s lack of trust, along with circles that implied Indigeneity and Beth’s false smile. In 10 cases he was able to predict that the child was Indigenous and if they were in foster care.

As evidenced in this research, the more artwork produced by the same individual, the more understanding we gain into the wellbeing of the child. Abbey and Lara produced the greatest number of artworks and in doing so they were able to visually depict aspects of themselves and their concerns that they could not articulate. Through the artwork the participants were able to represent ambivalence, anger and control in a safe way. It can help us to understand how the child is coping with conflicting and overwhelming emotions. The artwork in this thesis has added to our understanding by providing an avenue to view the nuances and layers from the child's point of view. The artwork has allowed us to see what is important to the child, at that particular time, in a way that words cannot. Even in the cases of Kate, Kristy and Nelly, who spoke of their culture as being part of their identity, it was through the artworks and the making of the artworks that one truly gets a sense of pride they hold for themselves, their culture and the family connection this ensures.

Andrew's '*Twin Hills*' and the dialogue that surrounded the artwork, provided insights into aspects of Andrew's feelings where he was experiencing some difficulty coping, such as, the divorce and separation of his foster parents, his foster mother refusing to talk to him and the subsequent loss of the "*perfect house*" and with it the perfect family life where "*we had everything!*" The artwork here allowed for a topic to be introduced safely and even created a means of dialogue with the foster father about the barbed-wire.

In the case of Andrew, Abbey, Tom, Mary, Tracey and Beth the artwork provided insight into their coping mechanisms, whether it be denial, control or, in Andrew's and Abbey's case, "*holding it in.*" It was through the art making process of Mary, Tracey, Dan and Beth, that we are able to view their lack of self-esteem, lack of identity and likely depressed state. Depictions of anger were present in the works of six of the participants, all of whom were in care. In all of these children's artworks anger within the artwork was either hidden, as in the case of the artworks produced by Beth, Lara, Abbey and Tony or denied, as was the case for Tracey and Mary. Unlike the Indigenous and Indigenous/Anglo participants who were not in care, the artwork of those in care lacked any visual sense of connection to their culture.

Several of the children depicted feelings as being, as Lara articulated, “*all jumbled up.*” Abbey in ‘*Hello Sun*’, Lara in the ‘*Feelings in My Heart*’, and Beth in ‘*Tear Drop 1.*’ Whilst others depicted their need to control their feelings such as in Andrew’s *Self Portrait* and Mary’s *Untitled*. Summer’s artwork provides a hopeful projection into the future. It provides a snapshot of a happy time when the dog is home from being in quarantine.

Abbey’s ‘*My Family*’ provided further insight into her relationships with her family as does her exploration of contact visits in ‘*Hello Sun*’. Lara’s exploration of the self in the ‘*Feelings in My Heart*’ and ‘*My Personality*’, provide a layered, multi-dimensional visualisation that make us aware of the complexities as she sees them.

In terms of identity and sense of self, the artworks present a clear demarcation between those children in care and those who are not. For those not in care, the subject matter ‘*identity*’ unfolded into depictions of either a flag, totem or a family drawing. Robby was the only exception here, in that he depicted his friend. In contrast, the artworks made by those in care appear to highlight a struggle with the self on some level.

In conclusion, the inclusion of the artwork as part of the narrative provided a richness of information that would otherwise have been unavailable.

This chapter explored and analysed the artworks and the art-making process made by the participants in the research. Art-making was important to many of these children as evidenced in their artwork and in their interviews. By utilising triangulation and viewing the work as part of the research data I have expanded upon the evidence produced by other data types utilised.

In the following chapter On Working With Children and Identity, I explore the meaning of identity for child protection workers along with how they work with identity in practice and theory, thus giving further context to the analysis provided by the children’s interviews and artworks.

Chapter Eight

On Working with Identity and Children

“You’re in the clan, it’s like a circle, if you take one piece out of it the circle breaks.”

(Malcolm Walker, Indigenous Elder)

‘As children gradually separate themselves from their parents or primary carers and create their own sense of self, their identity develops’ (*Looking After Children*, 1995).

As explored in Chapter Two, there is incongruence in how childhood and identity is perceived across cultures. This chapter seeks to explore how this incongruence translates into practice. As the above contrasting quotations highlight, questions arise as to the universal application of developmental theory and its cultural appropriateness, particularly in regards to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander people. Given that the research was undertaken in a regional area of Queensland, which contains larger than average populations of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and Australian South Sea Islander people with a high level of intermarriage the usage of such theory in practice is potentially problematic.

This section of the research was completed after the findings of the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry into Foster Care (2004) and subsequent *A Blueprint* (Queensland Government, 2004) which among other recommendations included a review of the legislation and practice standards in regards to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* together with a move to a more forensic model of child protection practice and the use of structured decision making tools at the practice level. Changes as discussed earlier, also included a re-structure of the child protection system, including a name change from the Department of Families to the Department of Child Safety.

This section of the research sought to ascertain what was actually occurring at the practice level for those professionals working with children in care in one particular region of Queensland at a particular point in time.

Context

The research involved one regional office and one satellite office with shared managerial structures and positions. At the time of this research, child protection offices within the Queensland system contained two distinct work streams. The professional stream within the two offices included in the research, is made up entirely of non-Indigenous workers who have an undergraduate degree in Social Work, Psychology or Social Science. As delegated officers (Child Safety Officers, known as CSOs), case decision-making rests with these workers with input from their Team Leaders, who also sit within the professional stream and who had invariably worked as CSOs for a year or more prior to promotion.

Perhaps due to issues around worker attraction and retention within this stream, CSOs are regularly recruited from the pool of mostly newly qualified social workers who, in the main, have not had practice experience working with vulnerable and traumatised children and families, particularly within an Indigenous child protection context. In contrast, the Indigenous workers in the study were all mature aged and had worked for a number of years (several for over a decade) in the child protection system.

The Departmental Indigenous workers all held positions as Child Safety Support Officers (CSSO), which, as non-degree holders, sit, within the administrative stream. The power differential within the structure was reflected in the responses of the Indigenous participants, for example:

“See I sort of feel sometimes when we try to say things to the non-Indigenous workers that because they’ve got a degree it’s like a bit of a barrier...like...what would you know?” (Stella, Indigenous).

The other Indigenous participants interviewed worked for an Indigenous child protection and care agency funded by the Department of Child Safety. Relationships between the two organisations have had a history of difficulty with the power differential outlined above being experienced within an interagency context. Given that AICCA was funded by the Department of Child Safety, this is not surprising.

It is also important to note the difficulty many Indigenous workers experience in being both a child protection worker and an Indigenous community member in terms of their relationships within their own communities.

Research Participants

All of the practitioners from the Department of Child Safety regional and satellite office and AICCA were invited to participate in the research. Of the eleven interviews conducted, all of the practitioners from AICCA, (4) elected to participate. All but one of the Indigenous practitioners (3) from the specified Child Safety Offices participated. Of the non-Indigenous workers from a pool of approximately thirty, a total of four participated. Table 11 below outlines this breakdown. It is interesting to note that of the non-Indigenous participants, three had several years of child protection experience in various positions. It is also relevant to mention that all but two of the participants knew the interviewer as a work colleague, which perhaps aided the comfort and trust levels of some respondents (particularly the Indigenous respondents) and conversely, might have contributed to the lower level of participation by non-Indigenous CSOs.

The interviews involved a set of open-ended questions used as prompts. A detailed synopsis of the research methodology and context are available in thesis Chapter Three. The use of large quotations throughout this chapter is intentional in that by so doing the actual words and intent of the reply remained honoured and unmitigated by someone else's interpretation, which can occur when paraphrasing.

Table 11: Participants - Workplace and Indigenous status

	Department of Child Safety workers	AICCA workers	Total
Indigenous	3	4	7
Non- Indigenous	4	-	4
Total	7	4	11

From the responses it was clear that for many workers, identity issues could be emotive as evidenced by the sharing of their own stories as each participant sought to explore what identity meant for them in the context of their own lives both personally and professionally.

Like elsewhere in this research, in line with the Foucaultian underpinning, it was important to define the specificity of the participants. Table 12, outlines the culture and gender of the participants. Only one of the Indigenous participants identified as Aboriginal only. Given that this section of the research set out to define practice issues, if any, in how identity is viewed and dealt with, it was also important to consider the interviewees' own cultural specificity and how this may impact upon the work that they do.

In Table 12, A, represents Aboriginal, SSI, represents South Sea Islander and TSI, represents Torres Strait Islander.

Table 12: Specificity of Participants

Gender	Name	Culture	Identification	Reason given
F	Stella	TSI/SSI	TSI	Follows father's bloodline
F	Petra	SSI/A	SSI	Follows father's bloodline
F	Bree	SSI/TSI/A Indonesian	SSI	Follows father's bloodline
M	Bill	A	A	N/A
M	Ray	SSI/TSI/A	SSI	Both parents SSI
M	Nick	SSI/A	SSI	Father SSI did not know mother's family
F	Gwen	SSI/A	SSI	Wasn't aware until later of A heritage
F	Fay	A/SSI	A	Parents disowned heritage identified as A as an adult
F	Brenda	Anglo	Anglo	N/A
F	Lena	Anglo	Anglo	N/A
F	Tina	Anglo/ Maltese	Anglo/Maltese	No reason given
F	Micka	Anglo	Anglo	N/A

Of the eleven participants, three were male and eight were female. Given the gender differential within the welfare industry, this was to be expected. Of interest is that almost half of the participants identified as being South Sea Islander. This could potentially have an adverse impact upon their reunification work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. However, as discussed earlier in this thesis, a high percentage of the children in care in the Mackay region, like the workers themselves are from a multi-cultural background. Of the Indigenous participants, one identified as being from a single culture, five identified as being from two cultures and two identified with being from three or more cultures.

In contrast, of the four non-Indigenous workers only one identified as being from more than one culture. Of the reasons given as to why the participant identified with one particular culture over the other, for those that grew up among their extended family, following the father's bloodline was the predominant response. Talking to workers, there was a strong sense that a multi-cultural background was not an issue. All of those interviewed that came from mixed heritage backgrounds had to, in the past, to make similar choices themselves in terms of cultural identity.

For others, the Indigenous history of cultural loss and family dislocation continued to be played out in their own lived experience. Highlighted as the interviews progressed is the very different premise by which Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants view identity and working with identity issues.

The Federal Government defines Aboriginality as, '[t]hat the person be of Aboriginal decent, that you identify yourself as Aboriginal, and that the community accepts you.' (Dudgeon, 2010, p. 66) This in itself can cause dilemmas for child protection workers whereby a range of adults involved in the child's life may make decisions about the child's cultural identity on behalf of the child and without consultation with the child.

Identity

When Indigenous workers were asked to describe what identity meant for them the metaphor of the circle was ever present and remained a constant across gender and all three Indigenous cultures. Four Indigenous respondents introduced the circle as a concept central to identity, which was in direct contrast to the non-Indigenous respondents who all relayed a number of psychosocial factors as being pivotal. The Indigenous responses are quoted below.

"Identity is the circle...it's where you fit into which group" (Stella, Indigenous)

"The concepts in the circle are absolute. The centre of everyone and everything. Throughout the different Aboriginal communities they each share the same concept even though it may be in a different language or dialect. Everything emanates from it and nothing exists outside the circle. Everything including living, dying, responsibility, taboos, everything is inside of it- it is conducive to a way of life, to proper being, the eternal connection. All life emanates from it." (Bill, Indigenous)

“Identity, it’s a bit like say grandma dies, well the circle gets smaller, someone gets born and the circle gets bigger. It’s about the whole family, the extended family. That’s why it’s a circle, it all links in.” (Petra, Indigenous)

“Well it is a circle because it’s how you fit in and it’s where you fit in.” (Bree, Indigenous)

One Indigenous participant also used the metaphor of the tree:

“Identity is about who you are...so it’s like a tree, your identity is the roots...if you’re a tree and you’ve got no roots.... you’re dying.... you’re nothing.... so, your identity is so important to who you are and how you see yourself.” (Petra, Indigenous)

For non-Indigenous respondents, identity was also deemed very important but was influenced by other psychosocial factors such as one’s employment, personality, how other people respond to you, family, one’s perceived purpose, one’s environment and the experiences one has as one develops.

One non-Indigenous respondent spoke of the impact of loss of identity as children move into adulthood.

“It’s important for children growing up to learn who they are and then for us as adults to also know that. We’re constantly seeking that information and if that’s taken from you or that’s interrupted, which can happen for children who enter the child protection system, it can have ongoing consequences for a person as they move into adulthood. You know they are at a disadvantage really so I think identity is very important for everybody.” (Tina, non-Indigenous)

Personality was viewed as innate by non-Indigenous workers, as the following quote highlights:

“I think you’re born with a certain kind of personality but it develops into how you see yourself through other people as a child. So if they’re always told they’re a bad child then they’ll grow up thinking they’re a bad child, for example.” (Brenda, non-Indigenous)

A number of these participants also mentioned the adolescent split from family into individuality.

“Working with adolescents it’s more about helping them to see they are not only a part of the family but that they are also an individual and separate from the family.” (Micha, non-Indigenous)

Cultural Connection and Ceremony

Non-Indigenous respondents also felt that it was a family responsibility to maintain culture for children in care.

Indigenous participants also spoke about how they as individuals chose to identify with one culture over another.

“Because my mother married into Torres Strait and culturally we take on his (father’s) side because she’s married into his culture life. If she married into another culture well then we’d take on that cultural background ...so there’s a cultural connection.” (Stella, Indigenous)

Indigenous respondents outlined the importance of cultural practice and ceremony in maintaining this connection.

“Your identity is like it’s...who you are, it’s about you know like even the simplest of things- it’s what you eat, and things that you and the people that you belong to do and how they see the world view. Identity is taught to you as a child by your parents or your grandparents. They tell you where you come from and where you belong and where you fit into.” (Petra, Indigenous)

One respondent spoke about their own experience of nurturing family members and how extended family was utilised.

“Say I had a baby and he doesn’t know that he’s a Torres Strait Islander then my responsibility is to nurture that within that child and if we’ve got other community members around well they help nurture that as well and then the child learns things like the foods that we use, ceremonies that we do, traditions that we might hang onto and then he kind of realises that he belongs to a group of people that call themselves Torres Strait Islander’s and what they believe....so your beliefs come into it...your spiritual beliefs.” (Stella, Indigenous)

Stella's description is reminiscent of the reworked systems approach highlighted earlier.

Another respondent detailed the family ritual they experienced as a child.

"Identity, it comes with birth. For example, when I was growing up my parents would sit down every Friday afternoon and they'd talk about all the family and all the connections and stuff. Where you were related through different people. You are aware of different people but then they'll say like you're related to so and so because of ...either marriage or something like that."
(Gwen, Indigenous)

Family and Elders

The importance of extended family and Elders was also a common theme running throughout Indigenous responses. The following five quotes highlight these factors.

"Identity like I said it's who you are to family." (Bree, Indigenous)

"Identity is nurtured but then, on the other hand say if a child's grandparents or parents have gone, this is where extended family step in and they tell you you're from this village, you belong to that family, you know things like that." (Stella, Indigenous)

"Also you've got extended family which is the most important part in Aboriginal and any other...you know...Torres Strait Island and South Sea Island culture, your extended family."
(Petra, Indigenous)

"Identity is who the elders are, where you come from and what's your clan do. What's your tribal land. What was your totem...you know, how we lived of the land and the sea. I believe that identity is about knowing your language." (Fay, Indigenous)

"The Elders, they've got a lot of influence on your identity. When you know your identity you follow your bloodline down and the girls follow their father's." (Bree, Indigenous)

The respondents were asked how identity is formed and what influences identity formation. Indigenous workers unanimously believed that it was something you were born with that then gets nurtured and taught in order to 'help grow-up the spirit' (Martin, 2005, p. 38).

“You’re born with it, then it gets taught from when you were small. The Elders tell you where you are and what to do. This is drummed into us from the minute we’re born from the very beginning to the end.” (Gwen, Indigenous)

For three Indigenous respondents knowing their cultural identity occurred once they reached adulthood. The following quotes are indicative of the difficulties faced by large numbers of Aboriginal people in Australia as evidenced by the *Bringing Them Home* and *Little Children are Sacred Reports*.

“My children started to ask about their culture and even though I’ve asked my Dad and my Mum they don’t really want to speak about it much. I said to Dad it’s nothing with you having a handout or you know, claiming for Native Title and all that sort of stuff. It’s about my identity you know. I want to know my identity for myself and my children and my grandchildren because they’re going to ask one day and ...you know where did my great grandmother come from and all that sort of stuff.” (Fay, Indigenous)

and,

“Sometimes I get real emotional. I’ve got to stop myself, you know. It’s frustrating to know that you come from a unique culture and even our own people are ignorant of it sometimes. When I look at my Dad for instance, I want to talk to him about it but I don’t talk to him about that...you know...and I don’t know whether he’s ashamed or whether he’s been hurt by what’s happened in the past.” (Fay, Indigenous)

For one respondent, separation from extended family was experienced as a loss.

“My grandfather came from the Islands, he came over as a slave. My family were all separated. The fact is I really come into culture, you know, being Aboriginal or South Sea Islander ... I didn’t really come into that ‘til I started working in an Indigenous corporation, and that was back in 1997!” (Nick, Indigenous)

In Theory and Practice

As highlighted earlier, the research also found from the responses of the CSOs that Erikson's Identity Model is still utilised widely in social work practice. The following statement was typical of Indigenous workers' response when being showed the Erikson model, *"that boy's confused"*, when it was explained that it was created by a really famous theorist that social workers still use today, the response was, *"Holy Hell! Someone should probe him and tell him a different story."* (Petra, Indigenous)

Given the importance participants gave to identity, the research tried to ascertain what happened in practice and how participants worked with identity issues. All of the participants felt that the care experience can have a negative impact on young people and they all could cite cases where children remained unaware of their cultural heritage and the negative impact of this. This was also evidenced in the research whereby three of the children in care were unaware of their Aboriginal heritage and one fifteen year old had only recently been informed.

Indigenous participants spoke with frustration as they cited case after case whereby the wrong identity was assumed on initial contact, family connections were not being sought and where children were being placed with a different cultural group and as a consequence had lost family and cultural connections.

As one Indigenous respondent stated:

"I've only been working in the Department for four years and I am quite disappointed...for me to see what's happening to the Indigenous children. There's a lot that have lost their cultural identity, they (CSOs) don't even link the children into family groups...so I don't think the Department is doing enough to ensure they don't lose their cultural identity. I mean I have been asked to work with a family who are Indigenous, but the kids don't even know they are (Indigenous), now how am I suppose to get through to those kids. The Department wants me to work with those kids to understand their identity but it goes against everything I have said. It has got to be taught and caught and nurtured. These kids are placed with white carers." (Petra, Indigenous)

Another long-term Indigenous worker stated:

“Nine times out of ten they (the children) are placed with the wrong person. They are still writing down the wrong identity. A classic example was this morning, I told them, I said the family is not Aboriginal it’s Torres Strait we need to change that. I know the girl (the CSO) has the mentality that you know, they just go out and do a notification on this family and if they are black they just put Aboriginal instead of going into depth and asking the family.” (Bill, Indigenous)

A number of Indigenous respondents spoke of working from a different value base than their non-Indigenous co-workers. Indigenous respondents highlighted kinship and skin group systems, the importance of regular participation in ritual, ceremony and other family gatherings as outlined in the following quotes made by six respondents:

“Definitely we come from a different ideal base.” (Bree, Indigenous)

“It comes back to that model where they think it’s just Mum and Dad you know. There’s no consideration for the grandmother, great-great grandmother. They think they don’t have to worry about it. Well in Indigenous families you’re aunty and uncle are like your mother and father. Your grandmother is just as important as your mother so it’s a different value system.” (Stella, Indigenous)

“In the Department there is a sense of, well it’s just the immediate family that counts and nothing else. That’s all they think about. That’s very white orientated isn’t it? It is very white man theory.” (Gwen, Indigenous)

“It’s a different value system. For example, if we might think about attending a funeral, a family funeral or a tombstone opening, these are very significant traditions for us.” (Petra, Indigenous)

“The thing that hurt me the most was the Department stopping those children from attending their grandmother’s funeral. See to me, that funeral was more than just putting to rest their grandmother because being there they get into that circle of family and how they are related and so it’s you know, really important. Well they might think that’s not important and we sort of can’t really get that through that, yes it is because that’s a building block for that child’s identity.” (Stella, Indigenous)

“You know, I know how the Department thinks like...oh...a funeral that’s morbid for a child, they will get traumatised. But for us it’s part of that circle, the link, the spirituality. It’s no use saying, oh grandma’s gone to heaven and cry because you know this is what happens. This is where grandma is, this is grandma’s grave. This ceremony is where the families will come, people will come from miles around, come to that funeral and that’s their family expectations ...it’s more or less like a family reunion.” (Petra, Indigenous)

Restrictive Work Practices

One non-Indigenous respondent spoke at length about the difficulty of organising children’s participation in events and ceremony.

“So if a child can’t live with their family of origin or extended family they still need to be able to have that connection. They still need to be able to participate in significant family events, weddings, funerals, birthdays. It happens for some families, some children with families that can take on that level of supervision. For other families where there’s found not to be able to have a level of functioning that ensures the children’s safety needs are going to be met it won’t happen because, of course we’re an agency and we don’t work after hours. We don’t work on weekends. We don’t take children to significant family events when they live four or five hours away, so there is a missing out for children and that’s not only for our Indigenous children...that’s for all children who enter the child protection system. We basically work from nine to five, Monday to Friday and anything that happens outside of that time frame, unless there are suitable family or community people who can pick that extra stuff up, children linking into significant family events is going to be interrupted and not experienced and it is going to impact on their sense of identity.” (Tina, non-Indigenous)

The issue of working hour flexibility is evident in this quote as it highlights the limits of such structured working hours when it comes to children in care. Workload issues may also play a role in limiting the time, even within office hours if a worker is to consider the time needed to travel along with the increase in administrative tasks needed to allow for travel.

Some CSOs perceive that their role does not include working with identity issues, for example:

“Well in my role as a CSO we don’t really get a lot of time to sit and work directly with the kids. It’s not really our role.” (Brenda, non-Indigenous)

One CSO mentioned that if there was an issue the course of action they would take would be to:

“Look at the carer and say ‘Did you realise that this child is struggling?’ Maybe they need some training around the issue.” (Lena, non-Indigenous,)

Tokenism

A number of Indigenous participants also mentioned the perceived tokenism of events like NAIDOC for children in care as outlined by the two respondents below:

“See to them, (CSOs) I’ve noticed when they do a Case Plan up, when they put in the cultural section things...you know...they just put NAIDOC. That’s not enough for a child!” (Petra, Indigenous)

“They don’t know who to identify with and because some of them are put with non-Indigenous carers, that’s where they lose that identity. They put them in with white people and the only thing they plan for in terms of cultural is, you know, NAIDOC Day, That’s once a year, you know! You got to live it to know your father’s bloodline and the boys, their mother’s.” (Stella, Indigenous)

A number of Indigenous participants spoke at length about their sense of connectedness to the land and country.

“There needs to be proper practice from people who have a sense of the circle. It’s about taking them to walk on the earth, see, feel, and hear. Hear the silence. Utilising the ecology to give sustenance and substance to young people. We need to embrace these tools like cleansing the internal with good food. Young people in care are disturbed spiritually.” (Bill, Indigenous)

Indigenous workers also held a high level of concern about children who may return as adults looking for their identity, but that these stories are being lost or are at best left incomplete. They fear that the children themselves will hold them personally accountable. Throughout the interviews the internal struggle felt by the Indigenous workers to provide cultural identity and context for children in care was evident.

Not only are these workers “tasked” with “teaching” cultural identity to children who are completely disengaged from it but often these children are not of the workers own culture. For these workers, culture is an ongoing lived experience embedded within the extended family circle and cultural context, something at which they feel at odds to be able to provide. Here are three examples:

“We found an Aboriginal placement for this child recently but they wouldn’t move her from her white carers. But down the track when she becomes a grown woman ...she can come back to this agency and say to them, you were in place...why didn’t you put me with my people? You know...and what are we gonna say to her? She will say, you had the opportunity, you had the talk to act for me, to get me out of these white people’s home and into my own peoples and you didn’t!” (Bree, Indigenous)

“Indigenous young people face different issues to non-Indigenous young people in foster care... in terms of identity because especially when they’re placed with a non-Indigenous family. They feel out of place and how do we not know that they don’t lie in bed thinking where do I really come from? You know...they must...they must think about that. If they have that background and they’re not living it how do we not know that they don’t? I know that we are a people... we are people that are very spiritual in different ways.” (Fay, Indigenous)

“If it’s a young male with white carers they wouldn’t be able to teach him to grow up in an Indigenous way. Learning about the spiritual side. Mum’s got a cousin she was spiritually tormented when she was a young girl because she lived with white people all her life.” (Ray, Indigenous)

Indigenous workers also mentioned particular ceremony pertinent to young men and women.

“You see, I sort of feel that when we’ve got young boys there that are coming through their sort of at adolescent stage and it’s a time when their uncles or significant men teach them pertinent things. That just doesn’t happen when they are in care and then we wonder why the kids are walking the street sniffing paint!” (Gwen, Indigenous)

Men’s business and initiation are culturally important. In the Northern Territory where communities are more traditional, male initiation is a serious business undertaken by the Elders with strict gender protocols around how and where it occurs and with whom.

The ceremony differs from community to community but ultimately it is the boys' initial foray into manhood. Once initiated, strict gender and skin group protocols must be obeyed.

The majority of Indigenous respondents highlighted not only the differences between Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander cultures but also spoke of the importance of knowing the differences between the numerous Aboriginal cultures.

"Look at this little one that a coworker had to go and work with. Those little kids don't know who they are. They don't know their origin. You know we didn't know where to start with those kids and look and that big time Team Leader who said, oh take some books out show 'em some of this, show 'em that It's alright saying that but we gotta know where they are actually from. You know are they desert people or do they come from near the sea?" (Petra, Indigenous)

In the Northern Territory these differences are ever present. For example, the Arnhem Land Aboriginals known as Yolgnu are sea faring people and differ in language, symbolism, cultural practices and Aboriginal law from the desert people who, although they share the same state, live nearer to Alice Springs some 1600 kms away. Aboriginal people are culturally also highly mobile, with extended family living across Australia. An example of this mobility is ever present in the Northern Territory where populations move seasonally between communities.

The Stolen Generation has exacerbated the issue in that interstate transfers of Aboriginal children were common practice. The following quote is a typical example:

"Like we got children up here and they might belong to like down in Victoria...they've had no links ...no links whatsoever. We're keeping them from their culture, from their community, their country, knowing where they come from. Even though you know we might take photos and all this sort of stuff it's not the same...it's not the same...! They learn about culture by being there in the community with their people and we are not doing that! It's very poor practice within Child Safety." (Fay, Indigenous)

There is also an assumption made by non-Indigenous workers that if a child is placed with an Indigenous carer, particularly a relative carer, that the relative is automatically linked into their culture and to their community.

As one participant stated “*This is a big assumption...big...big!*” and then went on to explain;

“Well I mean I’m just thinking... I was thinking about that family, you know. Where the aunty (relative carer) wouldn’t sort of link the children in. She wouldn’t have nothing to do with it. It was really as if she wanted to isolate the girls from their family and culture and that’s wrong.” (Stella, Indigenous)

There also seems to be a tension in practice between adhering to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* and the use of Attachment Theory to leave children in culturally inappropriate placements. The process of registration for carers can be a protracted process that runs contrary to providing quick appropriate placements with family. It can be typically months and sometimes years before possible family placements become known and assessed by the Department as suitable. The process entails a variety of checks that are dependent upon a number of other government bureaucracies for processing.

A participant from AICCA referred to one recent case:

“It took a while for all the paperwork to be done. The family wasn’t deemed suitable so we went outside the family and got an Aboriginal person as a carer for that child. The Department still wouldn’t let it go. They said she was settled with a white carer.” (Bree, Indigenous)

One carer registration check necessary across all jurisdictions of Australia is the criminal history check, which can prove problematic for a number of reasons such as, the lack of trust in the Department (still termed “*welfare*” by Indigenous people across Australia) holding such personal information. Many Indigenous people still continue to hold concerns that any historical criminal history, even if it is minor and unrelated to caring for a child will at best disqualify them from the process, or at worst mean that their own children may be taken away from them should they come under the Departmental radar.

For a large number of Aboriginal people living in remote areas, proof of identity can become highly problematic. In order to apply for a criminal history check one needs to provide several types of identification including photo identification, (usually a license) and other forms such as birth certificates.

Many older remote Aboriginal people do not have these forms of identification, which can disqualify them from the process. For those that do, the process also demands that they produce their identification in person at a police station. For a number of Top End Northern Territory remote communities and outstations there is no local police station and the nearest station may be several hundred kilometers away, the road to which can be impassable in the wet season.

One non-Indigenous respondent considered the extended family a positive in as far as it increases one's potential pool of carer options but went on to explain how other criteria can disqualify family members as carers.

“Then there may be some other issues within that family. There may be violence, there may be alcohol abuse, there may be criminal history stuff, there may be unable to meet the needs of an individual child. They may only have a three bedroom house and they’ve got ten people living in there or whatever and so actually be unable to physically care for another person you know, so there’s all these factors that can be the downfall of the large extended family.” (Tina, non-Indigenous)

The influence of the CSO's own cultural and socio-economic specificity in making placement decisions was also evidenced in the research.

This CSO's comment about overcrowded housing perhaps fails to consider Aboriginal notions of community and the sharing of resources, nor does it consider the level of poverty experienced by large sections of the Aboriginal community across Australia. As discussed earlier, overcrowding also occurs due to the lack of available housing, which was highlighted recently in the Northern Territory and, as a consequence, as a part of the Federal Government's National Affordability Housing (NAHA) Agreement, the Government have introduced massive spending on Indigenous housing strategies. Lack of available housing in remote communities requires large family groups to share housing. The seasonal and ceremonial migration of large family groups further exacerbates the overcrowding issue. It is also often the case that as a consequence of kinship systems, when family members are deemed by kin to be unable to care for their children, it is the grandmothers, aunties and uncles who step in.

In highly dysfunctional families the care of a number of children can fall upon the same responsible adults with few supports available.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

Some Indigenous participants also struggled with the interpretation of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*:

“Why does a child of inter-racial mix... why does that child always have to be placed in an Indigenous home? Yeah, you know there’s a lot of the families here like that...because you get some...non-Indigenous mothers that say, look we don’t want our children placed with a black family.” (Nick, Indigenous)

Non-Indigenous respondents raised the issue of absent and disconnected fathers for children in care.

“The biggest thing I’ve had for children with identification is when mother’s don’t know or won’t disclose who the fathers are and the children don’t have the opportunity to know the other side of their family ...they’ve got two different families. So we do have children in care who have no identity connection to a part of their life, which they deserve to have. Sometimes the mothers know who they are and the fathers choose to have nothing to do with their family. That’s probably more of a personal issue for me because all children deserve to know their roots. That’s a part of their identity, it’s like part of their life’s missing.” (Micha, non-Indigenous)

It has been the practice that if the parent (usually the mother) refuses to disclose family contacts to the Department, that these connections are never pursued, that is unless the family themselves make contact with the Department.

The Stolen Generation

For the majority of Indigenous workers there seemed to be a sense that The Stolen Generation continues to occur through poor casework practice on the part of non-Indigenous CSOs. A number of Indigenous workers felt that the system continued to allow the “*ripping apart*” of families as evidenced by the four quotes below:

“In lots of cases in the Department it’s just like the past, the Stolen Generation. It’s all happening today because things haven’t been done properly, you just get so frustrated! It’s so sad. They talk like its happened years ago but it’s still happening today. You know the Child Safety Practice Manual that speaks of reunification, and not only that but of having the links with their culture and their people...well...it’s not happening!” (Petra, Indigenous)

“Our kids in care are still part of the Stolen Generation to me and that makes me feel very sad indeed.”
(Fay, Indigenous)

“You’re talking about Stolen Generation...you’re talking about a whole...you know several generations that were and are ripped apart.” (Gwen, Indigenous)

“You know the way I see it is that with the Department when they put children into long-term guardianship, for some of these littlies that can just rip them apart.” (Stella, Indigenous)

Indeed when non-Indigenous participants spoke of the effects of the Stolen Generation it was viewed as a past happening that may have residual effect in the present.

“It’s still a very new history. The parents and grandparents were of the Stolen Generation and these are the people who influence the identity of the children today. So if they are negative this gets passed onto the children.” (Tina, non-Indigenous)

Two non-Indigenous respondents spoke of cases whereby a child’s cultural identity had remained unknown until recently but did not view it within the wider historical context.

“I know we have got another child whose just recently been deemed to be Indigenous, if that’s the way to put it? That child in particular really doesn’t have much sense of who they are or what they are and are very torn by their circumstances in that way...and just things that have happened in their life. The child is nine years old and has been in care since they were three days old. They are with non-Indigenous carers and they’ve only recently been identified.” (Brenda, non-Indigenous)

“I was just thinking about these kids, we didn’t know they were Indigenous. We brought them into care. It started with an intervention order, then a short-term order then a long-term order. The Mum, the paternal and maternal sides were both Indigenous in terms of the child’s grandparents but to look at Mum and Dad you wouldn’t know they are Indigenous. They never identified. The kids were just brought into care like any other child. These kids have got all sorts of troubles and I sometimes wonder if we had of known years ago that they had Indigenous history would that of helped? I found out years later that there were heaps and heaps of family all around town. We could of connected these kids in with family many years ago. It’s interesting how this family just seemed to slip through the cracks.” (Lena, non-Indigenous)

Several Indigenous Departmental participants talked about non-Indigenous Department workers making judgments that they arrived at due to skin colour.

“There was a case where we didn’t know the family name and the comment from the workers was. ‘They are not Aboriginal they are too white’! This was from white workers. I found that really offensive, how dare they! If you passed my grandson on the street you wouldn’t connect that he was my grandson.” (Stella, Indigenous)

When asked how the trust in the Department of Child Safety could be rebuilt, the difficulty of this task was reflected in the responses of three Indigenous participants.

“Too rebuild that trust with the Department, that’s a hard thing to do. That goes way, way back. Like Mum’s generation down to us, well they’ve still got that fear like and that you know, white man’s gonna come and take your kids from em...” (Petra, Indigenous)

“I mean the stories that we’ve heard about children that have been in care, they are adults now, and they are not nice stories. They are not stories that you can be proud of to tell your children or your grandchildren.” (Gwen, Indigenous)

“You know I think in some ways if the Department doesn’t get it right with connecting our families up, well then they’re still robbing the kids.” (Fay, Indigenous)

Indigenous respondents also raised concerns about what they termed the “welfare cycle” and the impact of this on the children they try to assist. Here is a typical example:

“That’s the cycle...that welfare cycle...it’ll just continue on to the next generation. Here’s a classic example of a family in the Department where grandmother was in care, mother was in care, daughter was in care, grandchildren are in care. You know that’s three generations there. You know the little girl is about nine years old. Back here with grandmother they were very isolated from their community and their culture. So it was just grandmother’s mother trying to do it alone. So grandmother, daughter, granddaughter they don’t have a strong cultural identity. Well their Aboriginality, their culture has just faded away, lost in the welfare cycle.” (Petra, Indigenous)

The Sadness Within

All of the Indigenous Departmental participants expressed a deep sense of sadness and frustration, with one worker describing the plight of Indigenous children on long-term child protection orders as, *“Breaking the back-bone, in that they cut them off from their family of origin and their extended family.”* (Bill, Indigenous)

The following three quotations further highlight this plight.

“Like those little ones that poor worker had to go and see. They don’t know who they are, they don’t know their origins, and you know, we didn’t know where to start with these kids. We still don’t know.” (Petra, Indigenous)

“It makes my heart sad. Like that day the Team Leader said, you need to go out. When I seen those little kids my heart dropped for that little boy to look at me and say, ‘You’re Black!’ He didn’t know he was too. It makes my heart so sad my dear.” (Stella, Indigenous)

“What I found working with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in this community here is there’s been a loss of identity. It’s very, very sad and everybody’s just...they haven’t stood up for the rights of our people and I don’t know why.” (Fay, Indigenous)

The immense sadness and frustration expressed by these workers is perhaps connected to their perceived sense of powerlessness to affect change in the lives of the children with whom they work. All of the Indigenous workers conveyed a sense of responsibility and commitment to helping their children in care, yet felt unheard and undermined in the workplace both systemically and, for Department workers, personally.

Circles Continue to Break

It was evident throughout the interviews that the majority of Indigenous participants felt there were theoretical, systemic and practice issues that continue to impede best practice in terms of identity as highlighted by the following four quotations:

“The system puts the cart before the horse, instead of addressing the true needs of children. They only have the capacity to address the physical needs.” (Nick, Indigenous)

“Everybody carries the genetics, the connection but people have been systematised in the Department and they don’t know they all belong to that circle.” (Bill, Indigenous)

“There are families in there where the children have got Torres Strait Islander heritage...they’re placed out with people who are not even from that heritage, so even in the placement of children it isn’t done right.” (Ray, Indigenous)

“We see children getting taken quite young and nothing is put in place to ensure that their cultural heritage is maintained and nurtured so for me to go and just do visits and try to convince these kids that they’re Aboriginal...well!” (Stella, Indigenous)

This notion of CSSOs being tasked with providing cultural identity was viewed as highly problematic for all of the Indigenous respondents who worked for the Department of Child Safety, here are two examples:

“The Department didn’t know what to do and they just sort of think you just go there and just front up and you know make them Aboriginal when they didn’t even know there was black in their family.” (Petra, Indigenous)

“The Department thinks that they’ll see a black face and they’ll relate ...but you can’t do that!” (Stella, Indigenous)

One non-Indigenous worker also mentioned such a case:

“Some children I had on my caseload were actually identified as Aboriginal and they never knew it because they were in care when they were seven to eight months old. They’ve never been informed of their heritage, their cultural story. They presented as very Anglo, white and mainstream. We slowly detected in a couple of the children who actually looked a little bit Aboriginal, but they had no awareness whatsoever. So part of my development for them, to create their own identification and know their true culture was to introduce some CSSO’s into their lives who were from Aboriginal descent and to go down there and just basically be a face. Be present and gradually let them know that they’re of the same culture or similar culture and gradually introduce teaching them about their history, their culture, where they come from, which part of Australia. But it didn’t change things for them because it was only happening for a couple of months and it wasn’t occurring regularly like I wanted to. I requested that the CSSO’s at least be involved in the family...like for an hour and a half a fortnight or something. Just to be there...so that they become familiar with at least the colour of the skin.” (Lena, non-Indigenous)

Indigenous workers also felt at odds with some of the placement decisions made by caseworkers.

“A classic example is, I went to this family, there were three sisters and two sisters went with an Indigenous family, one little sister went to her non-Indigenous grandmother. When the kid was re-placed she was placed with a white family....now tell me...so tell me what’s that all about? The child has very white skin. She’s white blond...lily white. So even to this day it’s like...it’s very hard on her. It’s very hard for them to interact as a family. But the other side of it is that sometimes you get children whose other family do not understand they are Indigenous and they get placed with black people. I don’t know what the answer is but...I think sometimes that is a bit of a cultural shock when you put them straight into Indigenous families if all they know is white way.” (Petra, Indigenous)

Two Indigenous Departmental workers highlighted the systemic issues in trying to provide timely, culturally appropriate placements as highly problematic.

“I think when children are coming through and ...you know...we’ve got to find them a placement really fast, family options don’t get looked into quickly enough. Then the Department just says, oh well we’ve got other priorities, so the kids identity and how they’re going to fit in the family is just not a priority any more. The Department thinks well, they’re in a safe environment. Yes they’re safe but what about their identity? They are robbing them of their identity...that’s the way I feel!” (Stella, Indigenous)

“Children are placed with non-Indigenous carers. You know they are left there so long the Department causes these problems themselves.” (Petra, Indigenous)

Some of the Indigenous Departmental respondents also mentioned Life Story Books.

“You know how they talked about the Life Story Books, well I’ve never seen one in that Department. So we started like collecting pictures and trying to get all the kids together because they’re with different families. They are a large family so what has the Department done to gather their story? They are not going to stay with the Department forever and ever amen... they’re gonna come at eighteen or seventeen or whatever of age and they will look out to the community and they’re gonna think now whose still here in my family?” (Petra, Indigenous)

Petra's comments highlight that even minimum levels of collecting information about the extended family and community are not occurring. She also spoke of a project some time ago in Townsville office, which looked at reconfiguring the usual *Life Story Book* format into a more useful and culturally appropriate form. This project it seems was being shelved somewhere and she was unable to ascertain any more information about it. The rather linear format of the book is staged based. Family lines are usually formulated in a genogram type configuration. I asked both Petra and Stella to comment on the genogram format in terms of cultural appropriateness. They explained that rather than being linear, family lines for Indigenous children would diagrammatically look more like a spider's web.

Case Plans

Another frustration expressed by Indigenous respondents was the lack of case planning around identity issues. They spoke of the need to prioritise and plan for children's participation in ceremony and gatherings that extend further than participation at NAIDOC. For example:

"They should include in case plans that little Joe Blow spends so many weekends a month with people from his culture. Like if a family attends the Seventh Day Adventist Church, well they must ensure that the little fella goes because there's extended family members there." (Petra, Indigenous)

Access was described by Indigenous workers as being viewed by the Department as only being necessary with mum and dad. All of the Indigenous workers cited the importance of access with extended family and the wider circle, here are two examples:

"They should be having an access like every second or third week. Let the little kids start seeing who their great grandmother is...you know, she's the black lady, she lives on a dirt floor...let them experience that...but then they're not given that opportunity to do it." (Stella, Indigenous)

“You know and I know that the CSO’s have a lot of workload but it’s just so frustrating that you haven’t enough time in the day to try and do these things (working with identity), but I think that they should put that into the CSOs Position Descriptions and just say that you must link the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families...because it’s not there! It’s just all about ... you must consult..consult..consult the manager or the team manager or the Child Safety Manual!” (Fay, Indigenous)

For non-Indigenous workers, case planning was not viewed as an issue and children’s non-inclusion into extended family ceremony was often viewed as a resource issue.

There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that even after the resource boost as a consequence of the CMC Inquiry into Foster Care and the subsequent ‘*A Blueprint*’, case loads are still too high, coupled with a higher level of administrative requirements, a higher level of complex cases along with issues around staff attraction and retention, which may further impact case planning and case review requirements, as one non-Indigenous respondent explains:

“Most case plans that I’m aware of do reflect family connections, as far as seeing parents, visits so on and so forth...It’s mostly with the parents...” (Micha, non-Indigenous,)

Recommendations from Workers

Indigenous respondents suggested a range of recommendations that would help ensure culture and identity remain to the fore when working with children in care. Only by prioritising the linkage with family, culture and country can this occur. The following four quotes highlight this position:

“You see one of the key components of healing here, in a black fella way, is the capacity or the ability to be able to talk to people of their own country...in a Murri way, the responsibility of the healing process of country (belongs to the) Traditional Elders and I believe that’s one of the keys in regards to the little fellas that do come into care (by talking to) people within the circle who own that country and have a right to speak for it.” (Aboriginal Elder)

“That there should be proper training and that the cases should be checked over from people that are high in authority to say hey this is not happening for this child, they are not linked. There should be a review on each case, not when they have gone into long-term guardianship, cause once they’re gone into long-term guardianship that’s when they get lost to their identity. I believe that even if a child was taken when they were a baby and they don’t know who their parents are...that’s not the point ...they have a right to know their mother and their father and where they come from because they’re doing more damage to a child not trying to link them up with their culture or who their people are.” (Fay, Indigenous)

“I just like to emphasise that the Department of Child Safety still needs to work harder at letting our children know what their identity is...they need to prioritise it. I know that safety is a priority but also a priority is knowing their identity because we’re ruining children’s lives by not knowing their identity.” (Gwen, Indigenous)

“It needs to be set down as core work. I reckon that will help the Department a lot and The Stolen Generation thing would be sort of solved.” (Ray, Indigenous)

Indigenous participants raised several issues that they viewed as having a detrimental effect on practice. These included:

- The lack of Indigenous carers;
- Lack of trust between the Indigenous community and the Department of Child Safety;
- Lack of funding for early intervention programs;
- Lack of research into children’s backgrounds to find family and community prior to long-term placement;
- Value judgments made by some non-Indigenous workers around skin-colour and Indigenous identification;
- Case plans should include regular contact with extended family and it should be ongoing;
- The old indicators of child safety and wellbeing need to be redefined and have added to them, Indigenous notions of identity, culture, spirituality and healing,

- There needs to be mechanisms and systems to better distinguish between Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander for children to be aware of their particular backgrounds and not just a generic Indigeneity;
- Extended family should be utilised for regular respite particularly if a child is placed outside of kinship care;
- If a child is placed with a non-Indigenous carer it should only be for a short time as one respondent reiterated.

“If a child is placed in the wrong place it should only be like for a couple of weeks or something because once you leave them there too long these kids get set in those other peoples ways. This is where we got to hurry up and get them out of that placement.” (Bree, Indigenous)

Highlighted in this quote are the difficulties experienced once a child has been in a placement for a while and appears settled. The use of Attachment Theory here is pertinent in that there can be some reluctance by both the CSO and the non-Indigenous carers to break this attachment by moving the child to a kinship or more culturally appropriate placement, should one become available. Carers can and do contest placement decisions through the Children’s Commission, which can also add to the complexity surrounding case decision-making. The decision increases in complexity if one is also to consider interstate family placement options and the case transfer protocols between jurisdictions.

Discussion

Many Indigenous young people in out of home care are not given opportunities to know their “country”, be involved in ceremony and ritual or have knowledge of where they fit into the “circle.” Indigenous workers highlighted the importance of this inclusion in gatherings and rituals whilst non-Indigenous workers often cited children’s lack of attendance and inclusion as being a resource issue. The key principle behind current frameworks of practice in social work in line with Developmental Theory is one of familial separation and autonomy in adolescence, in contrast to the key principle of the Indigenous “circle” which advocates familial attachment and entrenchment. As Bond describes, ‘Most Aboriginal families right around Australian know the importance of identifying our “mob” and where and who we are related to and where we fit in’ (cited in SNAICC, 2005, p. 40).

The research also highlighted the lack of Indigenous and family carers as a major issue, with some systemic approaches in terms of community capacity building being suggested. Some workers felt that the reinstatement of Indigenous Early Intervention programs internal to the Department (as opposed to outsourcing), may help build the bridge of trust between the Indigenous community and the Department which, for some, was viewed as a major stumbling block.

This would mean a move away from the newly adopted forensic model for those borderline cases in order to build extended family capacity prior to the initial stages of child protection intervention, as well as help to enlarge the pool of general and kinship Indigenous foster carers. Another issue for attracting family carers may perhaps be the misconception and difficulties experienced around the criminal history checks process.

Current systems appear flawed in that they do not help ensure that knowledge pertaining to identifying extended family is sought at the onset of intervention. In many cases this information is never attained and as a result children remain isolated from their extended family.

Lack of regular case reviews especially for those children in long-term care may result in the lack of forward planning for some children, particularly around issues of identity. For Indigenous workers their frustration centered around the systemic and office culture norms that they felt acted as an impediment to best practice.

In terms of the utilisation of Indigenous workers as a cultural resource, their frustration lay in much of their time being taken up with access visits (with birth parents) which left them little time to undertake any work with children and young people around identity issues. Systemically this translates to their minimal inclusion into informing case plans and case outcomes around identity issues. Equally valid, there appears to be the underlying expectation that somehow these workers will provide “*culture*” to children in care without the systems and infrastructure to support this endeavor.

This chapter explored identity work in child protection, the theory bases utilised and current practice and practice issues as highlighted by workers in one regional centre in Queensland, at a particular point in time. The following chapter draws together the research findings highlighted in this and previous chapters to arrive at a new model of practice that would demand a paradigm shift to affect.

Chapter Nine

Discussion and Conclusions

The broken circles were ever present in the narratives of both the young people in care and in the lives of some of the Indigenous workers interviewed. The legacy of the Stolen Generation and the cultural losses that ensued, in the eyes of the Indigenous workers in this research, continue to be recreated by a child protection system that refuses to acknowledge and incorporate other cultural ways of knowing and being into practice, which has consequences for identity formation for children in care. Ever present in the research was the concept of the spirit and the spirit's link with identity and wellbeing. From the Elders of the Central Desert who, in Chapter One, described illness and sadness in a child as a loss of spirit, the participants in the research conducted by McMahon, Reck and Walker, in 2007, as discussed in Chapter Two, who spoke of intergenerational trauma as a spiritual death that leads to suicide, to the Indigenous workers in Chapter Eight who spoke of the young Indigenous people they work with being spiritually tormented. They all spoke of the need to embrace the healing tools inside the circle, such as connection to land and country, through the knowledge of the Elders and extended family.

By utilising a Foucaultian approach in terms of research methodology, and defining the subjectivity and specificity of the research subjects, we are able to understand meaning and truth from the perspective of the participants.

In relation to how children and young people who are from several cultures negotiate their cultural identity, children in this research who were not in care displayed a high level of cultural knowledge and connectedness both of which proved intrinsic to their sense of identity. Five of these young people were from four or five different cultural heritages, which for these children was not an issue in terms of their identity. Like the Indigenous workers in the research, one side of the family's cultural heritage may be favoured for cultural reason, such as following the fathers bloodline if you are female, but such a choice does not exclude identifying with the maternal cultural line. However, for the children in care such as Abbey, Dan, Beth, Mary and Ryan negotiating their cultural identity remained problematic.

The connection between skin colour and choice of cultural identity can also be made when reviewing the data. Those children who knew they were Indigenous/Anglo and were fair skinned, such as Mary, Beth and Tracey were able to choose to exclude or deny their Aboriginality from their identity, as physically they did not appear Aboriginal. Betty was the only exception here, as she was also fair-skinned but stated she was “*black*”, although she could not articulate what that meant for her. For other children such as Abbey and Dan, this kind of denial is perhaps not a realistic option yet they could not specify their cultural heritage.

Who’s Business is Identity Anyway?

Apparent in the research is that although all of the child protection workers interviewed cited identity as being very important to the wellbeing of children in care, a tension exists as to how this should be accomplished in practice and who’s responsibility it is, particularly for Indigenous children. From the interviews it was clear that the non-Indigenous CSOs felt that for Indigenous children it was the responsibility of the child’s family and the Indigenous CSSO. Whether this attitude is borne out of not feeling equipped to do so themselves, or a case of the workers believing that it is simply not part of their core business, is of concern given it is these workers that hold the power to make decisions on the child’s behalf. There was a clear divide in the research between the children not in care who all felt connected to their family and their culture/s and the children in care, who in the main, were estranged from their families or their culture and in many cases, both. Respondents in this research who were not in care, displayed higher levels of confidence, sense of identity and self-pride. In contrast the children in care, either displayed a lack of confidence, self-pride and identity, as was the case for Beth, Dan and Abbey for example, or were grappling with a major issue that may impact on these aspects, such as Lara, Tony and Andrew. It appears that for the children and young people in this research, there may be a correlation between feeling a sense of connection with family and culture, having a strong sense of identity and healthy psychological outcomes as young people move into adulthood.

The level of frustration and sadness expressed by the Indigenous workers in not being able to address the issue of identity for children in care was palpable in the narratives and case studies they presented. This sense of a CSSO visiting a child occasionally so that the child will “see a black face” and thus identify with their Indigenous culture is highly problematic, as highlighted by a number of workers who spoke of a child needing to “be” in the culture and to live the culture via connected family, community members and through ceremony.

In contrast, a recent paper by Sammut suggests that:

‘Growth in the OOHC care population is partly due to the system absorbing the effects of decades of problems in the broader welfare system. The increasing prevalence of child abuse and neglect in Australia is a result of the expanding size of an underclass of parents with intersecting (often intergenerational) problems-welfare dependence, substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence, sole and teenage parenting- which impair the capacity to properly care for children. These factors also influence the increasing length of time children are spending in care. But the primary source of the OOHC crisis- as the Senate Community Affairs Committee found in 2005- is the rising proportion of ‘high needs’ or ‘complex’ children in care with challenging behavioural, emotional and other psychological problems, including Depression, hyperactivity, ADHD, anxiety, Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder, sexual deviance, Conduct Disorder, aggression, delinquency and poor peer and social functioning’ (2011, p. 6).

Sammut goes on to attribute blame in regards to the failure of child protection as being child protection’s assumption in policy and practice that family preservation should be given precedence over early permanency planning and/or adoption. Instability to Sammut, it appears is the only contributing factor to a plethora of problems. Given the increasing prevalence of neglect and failure-to-thrive cases, I would argue that “blame” as such, is multi-systemic and multi-dimensional.

Systemically it seems from this research, that from the onset of departmental intervention, children’s identity and psychological wellbeing are not given precedence. In the flurry of removal, little else but the child’s immediate safety is considered.

According to respondents in this research, assumptions are often made on the basis of skin colour and parents are not asked to disclose their cultural specificity. The legacy of this practice is echoed in the children's stories presented in this research, whereby, children have the wrong culture named on their departmental file or, as was the case for four respondents in this research, culture remained unnamed. What this means for young people like Beth, who was told of her Aboriginal heritage as a teenager, should not be underestimated and it is likely that Lara, Alice and Andrew will face similar issues as outlined in Beth's narrative, when this information becomes known to them. It was not the role of this research to inform children of their cultural identity.

For children like Abbey, who are placed with relative carers, the assumption that this will ensure cultural and community connection is highly problematic. Abbey has no more notion of her culture than those children in the research placed with non-relatives. In comparison, Tom and Tony's placement with relatives who were connected to the extended family, the culture and the church, were able to identify their culture and connection with extended family members. However, these relative carers are not linked in with Tony and Tom's siblings, hence very little contact occurs with siblings. This challenges the Department's over reliance on kinship carers to provide all contact opportunities, apart from supervised parental contact.

A review of studies around contact in kinship care placements (Scott, O'Neill & Minge, 2006) found several key themes:

- Children's views must guide the contact process and frequency;
- There are no age-related rules or guidelines for contact, hence contact is to be considered on a case by case basis; and
- Infants and toddlers may need very frequent contact, perhaps several times a week in order to maintain relationships (McHugh, 2009, p. 64).

For parental contact to be meaningful and successful, the child's wishes need to be considered in terms of planning the frequency, location and who needs to be involved, as much as possible. Beth, Lara, Abbey, Tony and Andrew, all spoke of wanting to change the frequency, activity and type of parental contact.

Beth spoke of not being consulted and not feeling ready for the planned monthly contact visits with her mother. Lara and Andrew spoke of their contact visits with their mother as being boring and somewhat forced. It is likely that, as Andrew explained, “*sitting in a hotel room*” with their estranged mother, with nothing to do, has contributed to their feelings of wanting to cease or at least lessen the amount of time spent with their mother on contact visits. Abbey managed to make her feelings about contact visits known by speaking with her CSSO, hence I make the assumption that the caseworker was unaware of how Abbey felt and how contact visits were going up until this time.

Sibling contact was also a major theme in the research for children in care. Sibling contact for the children in the research either occurred as part of parental contact or not at all, unless arranged by the carer. Tying sibling contact to parental contact in this way, although resource efficient may not be in the best interest of the child in care. The children in care in this research all stated that they would like more contact with their siblings, separate from parental contact.

This research also highlighted impediments to finding family placements at the early stages of intervention. There are likely many reasons why, even when asked, that a parent refuses to disclose to the Department any details of the other parent, if they have separated. In cases where domestic violence is an issue, the parent/carers, usually the mother, may fear reprisal from the offending parent. Mary and Tracey’s family situation is a case in point. As a consequence of the alleged violence perpetrated by the girl’s father, their mother cut off all ties with the father and the father’s family. Their mother had also cut off all contact with her own family, which ultimately meant that Mary and Tracey had no sense of family ties or cultural connection. Given the mother’s history of bouts of reoccurring depression, PTSD and domestic violence with her then partner, their mother’s need to isolate herself or become isolated due to the situation is of no surprise. It was only some time after their mother’s death that relatives, including the father, approached the Department in order to arrange contact. This contact was however only with the father and hence did not include extended family on the paternal side. Whether there existed an assumption that Aboriginal Family will feel empowered enough to contact the Department, should they be aware that contact has been made with the father, remains unknown.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the level of family dysfunction experienced by many of the families who become known to the Department needs to be considered when case planning, as does the rights of the child in terms of their identity and having access to extended family both maternal and paternal. For the children in this research, all of the children in care spoke of the lack of contact with extended family and siblings and/or not knowing who their extended family were. As one non-Indigenous worker stated:

“...mothers don’t know or won’t discuss who the father is...children deserve to know their roots. That’s part of their identity, it’s like part of their life is missing.” (Micha, non-Indigenous)

As a consequence of excluding information about the father, extended family on the father’s side can often remain unknown to the case manager.

All of the workers interviewed could cite cases where the wrong cultural identity was attributed to a child and the negative effects this has on the child. Indigenous workers also spoke of a different value system, that is, systemically, extended family were viewed by their non-Indigenous colleagues as not being part of the nuclear family and were not included as part of the case plan. This coupled with the tendency to underrate the importance and cultural meaning of ceremony, such as funerals, likely contribute to this loss of connection to family and cultural identity.

“They should be having access every second or third week. Let the kids start seeing who their great grandmother is...you know, she’s the black lady, she lives on a dirt floor...let them experience that...but then they are not given the opportunity.” (Stella, Indigenous)

Stella described children’s attendance at ceremonies as being, *“The building block for the child’s identity.”*

One non-Indigenous worker mentioned the lack of case planning for attendance at ceremony as being a resource issue in that:

“We don’t take children to significant events when they live four or five hours away. We basically work from nine to five, Monday to Friday.” (Tina, non-Indigenous)

This lack of systemic flexibility in working arrangements supports the assumption that children's exclusion from these events will have no lasting consequence, or it is not deemed as important as worker's working hours.

Foster and Kinship Care Approval Systems

The foster care approval system, though necessary, can be a long drawn-out process. Checks have to occur over a number of different bureaucracies and sometimes jurisdictions. A child may be placed in emergency placement/s⁴⁷ for an extended period, or worse the process takes longer to complete and the child is moved to several placements.

Once a child has been in care for some time, if relatives or a more culturally appropriate placement does become known to the Department, as cited by workers in this research, the child's attachment to a current carer has been utilised by caseworkers as a reason not to move the child from their current placement. Likewise, carers can utilise the Children's Tribunal in order to overturn Departmental decisions.

At times, according to McHugh, search for an Aboriginal kinship placement was cursory at best, and that, given the crisis-driven nature of the process, workers often took the easiest route by placing the child with a non-Indigenous carer (McHugh, 2009).

Recent Innovations In Kinship Care

In recognition of an existing relationship, if it exists, between the child and the potential kinship carer, researchers suggest that there needs to be some 'flexibility' in the assessment process, while ensuring that the safety and well-being of the child is not compromised (Flynn, 2002; O'Brien, 2001; Wheal, 2001; Hunt, Waterhouse, Lutman, 2008).

⁴⁷ Each foster care agency usually has a pool of carers that are utilised for emergency placements, namely those placements that need to happen when a child is removed quickly to ensure their safety. Children are usually moved quickly through these placements in order to ensure emergency spaces are available.

McHugh emphasised that approval standards for relatives could be different, but that did not mean that standards were lower. McHugh suggests a 'supportive' assessment framework that would focus on the following aspects:

- 'gauging the ability of the relatives to meet the needs of the child;
- discounting early in the process people unsuited to meet the child's needs;
- being honest with relatives and sharing ideas;
- identifying support needs of the placement;
- ensuring relatives understand why the assessment is needed and why particular areas are covered;
- being friendly, informal, reliable and consistent;
- acknowledging differences in age, experience, race and beliefs (e.g. religion); and
- acknowledging the relative's concerns, fears and other things happening in their lives in regard to the placement' (McHugh, 2009, p. 43).

There have been some interesting international innovations that look to expedite the approval process for kinship/relative carers.

In Newfoundland for example, once a carer has been found, a preliminary assessment process is used. Final approval of the carer has to be completed within thirty days of the preliminary assessment. The preliminary assessment includes a range of checks that are not reliant on bureaucratic paperwork and processes, such as, interviewing all the people in the house, determining the wishes of the child regarding the relative being considered and a range of verbal checks and references from the police, schools, youth services etc. (McHugh, 2009, p. 41).

In Scotland, the Scottish Government has implemented an interim assessment/approval tool for kinship foster carers. 'The tool consists of two components – the *Child's Plan in Kinship Care* based on *'My World' Assessment Triangle*, and the *Child's Plan* and the *Kinship Carer Assessment*. Of interest in the carer assessment are the four timed stages when various tasks are carried out and agreements negotiated:

- the initial stage (within three working days of placement), for the Emergency Clearance Tasks and Agreement;
- stage two (within six weeks of the placement) incorporates the Intermediate Agreement with kinship foster carers to meet the child's needs;
- within three months the third stage the Kinship Placement Confirmation Meeting is held;and
- within six months of placement the fourth stage, the *Permanent Placement Discussion*, occurs (TFN BAAF, 2008b, pp. 9-19, cited in McHugh, 2009, p. 44).

A move to such a model would represent a shift from a regulatory legalistic assessment framework to a supportive one.

Family Group Conferencing

Family Group Conferencing was introduced after this research was completed but warrants discussion in terms of a potential collaborative framework. *Family Group Conferencing* is based on Maori practices, which provides families with agency to resolve child protection and Juvenile Justice matters. These conferences became part of child protection legislation in New Zealand in 1989 when they became the major decision making process in child protection matters. Queensland adopted *Family Group Conferencing* in 2006, but deviated from the original model in several ways. Conferences in Queensland are mandated by legislation when a case is en route to court and it was reported by the Australian Child Protection Clearing House, that '...orders are often sought even when agreement is reached in a conference' and 'the orders do not have to reflect the agreement reached' (Harris, 2008, p. 16).

This clearly contradicts the intent of the New Zealand model, which seeks to empower families and involve them in decision-making. The Queensland Department of Child Safety also has the discretion to endorse, alter, or amend the conference agreement prior to submission to the court. Hence case decisions that have been agreed upon by all stakeholders at the conference can be simply changed at the Department's will.

'In practice, this means that a department may bring extended family and professionals together to reach an agreement about how to address concerns, but that agreement may be subsequently ignored, despite there being no changes to the original circumstances that led to the conference. It might be speculated that in such cases conferences could be experienced as disempowering rather than empowering' (Harris, 2008, p. 20).

This is in contrast to the New Zealand model that uses conferencing to change the way in which problems are solved in mainstream child protection.

The Western Australian Family Engagement Model differs from the Queensland model in that conferencing can be used at all stages of the case and this 'fundamentally changes the way of working with families' (Harris, 2008, p. 23). There is also concern that when conferences are utilised in only the latter stages of intervention, family problems may become more entrenched by the time this occurs and 'it seems likely that conferences would work best, both for families and case workers, alongside (or preceded by) interventions that draw on the same collaborative philosophies' (Harris, 2008, p. 24).

The study by Harris also found that 'unsurprisingly', implementing a conferencing model in isolation does not necessarily transform practice (2008). As part of this report, child protection workers across Australia had been interviewed. A manager from an out of home care services in a large regional town explained that Family Group Conference (FGC) had been used extensively by departmental workers to begin with, but 'it had been found to be very time-consuming and complex and the Department did not have enough resources to continue doing it'. A further difficulty in rural-regional areas noted by this manager was that it was more difficult to arrange for FGC due to the geographical distances and costs to be covered in bringing family members together. Aboriginal families in particular did not always have transport to attend meetings, and sometimes, invited people did not turn up and meetings had to be rescheduled (Harris, 2008, p. 28). This manager noted that the use of FGC was especially complex for Aboriginal families. Often there were numerous family members (e.g. 20-30 people) who wanted to be involved in the decision-making process, and several family meetings would have to take place before a decision could be reached.

Further complexity occurred when both the maternal and paternal sides of the family had their own idea of who should be the most appropriate carer; ultimately a family assessment has to be carried out and it is the child protection agency who makes the final decision. The manager noted that often it became too impractical to pursue FGC (Harris, 2008).

It appears from these comments that perhaps not enough resources were allocated to ensure success.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

'In Queensland, statutory kinship/relative care appears to have been absorbed into/or placed alongside general foster-care services, without specific policy and operational procedures for kinship care services' (McHugh, 2009, p. 23). Kinship care is also faced with its fair share of controversial issues, including inequitable levels of support, both financial and non-financial (e.g. services); contentious carer assessment and approval processes (licensing); ad hoc approaches to supervision/monitoring of placements; and a lack of guidelines around contact between children and their birth parents' (Winocur, Holton & Valentine, 2009).

Of the thirteen children in care in the research, three were placed with kinship carers. Of the other ten children in care in the research, seven were placed with Anglo Australian carers, one was placed with an Indigenous carer from a different culture and two were self-placed, hence the cultural background of their carer, remains unknown to the researcher.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*, although legislated, can prove problematic in practice as evidenced in this research. Indigenous workers highlighted that for multi-cultural children, the cultural specificity of a placement can in turn mean that one side of the child's culture is privileged over others. In essence the choice of culture is made on behalf of a child through default, in that it is highly dependent upon who is available to care for the child at that particular time. If the placement should turn out to be long-term, according to workers in this research, a child may never get to know their cultural roots.

Departmental practices that do not acknowledge the differences between and within cultures can also exacerbate the issue.

Undoubtedly the lack of Aboriginal carers has an impact here. Essentialist notions of identity and culture can also translate into practice, both in terms of the children's placement and by assuming that attendance at a once a year festival such as NAIDOC can provide cultural identity to Indigenous children. For non-Indigenous children like Ryan, who is Chinese (Hong Kong), such a principle does not legally apply, hence his placement with non-Chinese carers goes unnoticed and unaddressed.

Other Practice Issues Highlighted in the Research

There have also been many occasions when I have observed poor planning in terms of a child's transition into a new placement, or indeed, back into the parental home, which has resulted in placement breakdown. Transition time-frames it appears, are often dictated by aspects such as the Child Protection Order expiry date and/or carer and worker availability. Transition plans that consider and involve the child in the planning and that involve a staged approach, from a proper introduction (if they are unknown to the child) and a phased in transition period as agreed upon by the carer and the child together, are likely more successful. In cases where this occurs the levels of anxiety experienced by a child moving permanently or longer term into a placement are likely lower, resulting in fewer challenging behaviours as a result of the child feeling over-anxious. On many occasions however, placements are changed suddenly due to a breakdown in the current placement. The causes of placement breakdowns are numerous. For example, the carers circumstances may have changed, the case manager/carer relationship may be fraught or, as is regularly the case, the carer is unable to deal with the child's behaviours, as these behaviours can have a negative impact upon the carer's own family by negatively effecting family dynamics. It is for this reason that children with sexualised and/or overly aggressive behaviours can be so difficult to place, as the safety of the other children in the placement needs greater consideration. Carers do receive training, ideally before they have a child placed with them, but are still likely to feel ill equipped to provide the necessary therapeutic response in these circumstances.

For young people such as Betty, Dan and Kim in the research, the system's inability to cope with aggressive, sexualised and absconding behaviours has resulted in many placement breakdowns and a heightened level of risk as their behaviours escalate. Lack of appropriate placement options exacerbates the problem.

The complexities of life for children in care were reflected in the children's narratives and artwork. Not only were these children dealing with removal into care, loss, the abuse itself, ongoing family issues and contact visits, but they also need to continuously negotiate their place in a foster family; Andrew's relationship with his foster brother is one such example. The changing dynamics within foster families, such as those discussed in the narratives of Lara, Andrew, Beth and Mary also need to be considered in terms of case planning and service provision. It was clear from their narratives and artwork that these children were struggling in this regard. In terms of support from the Department during these times, it seems likely that in the cases above, that the Department were largely unaware of their struggle. In Mary's case I am making an assumption that the Department was unaware of the alleged domestic violence taking place in the foster home. In Beth's case she had no caseworker and in the case of Lara and Andrew, being in long-term care and in a stable placement, ensured only minimal contact with their departmental caseworker.

Not one of the children in care in the research named their departmental case manager as being important to them, nor did any of the respondents display any positive regard for their case manager. Given the case managers undeniable decision-making power over the child, this seems problematic.

Lack of therapeutic engagement or access to counselling for Mary, Tracey and Beth is also of concern, as was the possibility of loss of the therapeutic relationship Andrew and Lara enjoyed with their current school counsellor, once they left for boarding school. Training specific to therapeutic engagement with this cohort of children is not part of core training in a large number of Social Work and Psychology courses. Being able to really engage with children and young people it appears is left to the individual skill set of the worker.

Perhaps there is the assumption that by simply opting to work with children in child protection, that workers possess these skills, or that being trained to work with adults is transferable to working with children.

The use of art and child friendly practices can enhance our understanding of identity and provide a safe means of exploration for the children we work with in care. The richness available by utilising this approach was clearly demonstrated in Chapter 7 within the analysis provided by both the researcher and Mr. Lee.

The sibling group of Lara, Andrew, Beth and Alice highlighted several issues in how casework occurs across office jurisdictions. Contact for these children as a consequence of living in different jurisdictions entails planning for contact to occur between case managers. It is their responsibility to ensure timely planning and Team Leader sign off of travel and accommodation occurs. In Beth, Lara, Andrew and Alice's cases, the fact that Beth and Alice did not have a designated case manager in the Department meant that for any contact to occur, be it sibling or parental, the onus was on the foster carers to arrange and support it, with Departmental approval.

Case transfers between area offices can also work to the detriment of children in care. In both the Northern Territory and Queensland, I have known many cases that sit with a child protection office for an extended period of time, even though the child has relocated to another area office jurisdiction. The case transfer process itself can be protracted. An office Manager/Team Leader can refuse to accept a case transfer if, for example, the case is due in court in the coming months, if the case files are not up-to-date or if the child has high needs.

In the case of the latter, transferring a case also means transferring financial responsibility, which may be an underlying reason not to transfer a case quickly for some Managers⁴⁸. Case transfers can also mean delegating a case to a worker who likely has an already large case load.

⁴⁸ For many high needs children, service to the child is provided by a Government funded NGO. These packages are specific to each child and can be very expensive. At the time of the research these packages were reviewed every three months and entailed a laborious submission process, which due to the amount of money involved needed to be signed off by the, Team Leader, Manager and Regional Manager.

Interstate transfer of cases are also an issue. Each state or Territory has an Interstate Liaison Officer who initiates transfers across jurisdictions. This process can take a long time, which can translate into a lack of service provision for the child and the carer and/or 'drift in care' until transfer occurs.

The managerialist aspect as highlighted above has a direct impact on quality child protection service provision. Lonne and Thomson, discussed the impact of managerialist ideologies on child protection practice, post CMC in Queensland. They found that:

"Essentially, there were two distinct ideologies operating: a managerialist one that communicated and practiced in terms of political and management discourses, and a professional one that operated in a practice-focused way, and was fearful of, but resisted, management power and authority. Some submissions highlighted a parallel process between the power-laden and conflicted management/staff relationships, and how, in turn, staff related similarly to clients and stakeholders." (2005, p. 91).

During his interview, Ryan spoke of his disappointment at the length of time sign-off by his case manager can take, for something as seemingly simple such as, attendance at a school camp, excursion or sports occasion. This seems like a small thing but for a child or young person, exclusion from these activities can have a negative impact, as does Mary's experience of regularly having to wait outside the Principal's office for the late arrival of her CSO. It is these seemingly little things that can be so important to a child that make all the difference to a child's relationship with their case manager. It can also help the child's self-esteem by demonstrating that their needs matter and that they are respected. Likewise a carer's request to include the children in their care on family holidays requires the submission of the relevant paperwork for sign-off by a number of departmental workers before consent can be granted. The protracted nature of this process and the reliance upon the case manager to action the request in a timely manner can often result in the child in care being excluded from these activities and opportunities. This also has implications for the respite care systems at certain times of the year, such as school holidays, when the demand for respite care greatly increases as a consequence.

Conflicting Systems

A child in care is also involved with a number of other systems. In this research, Tracey, Tom, Tony, Dan and Betty had all been involved with Child and Youth Mental Health to varying degrees. Tony and Tom were being assessed for ADHD, whilst Dan had previously been diagnosed. The concern here is the effect of Dexamphetamine use in the long-term for children in care and the potential to further impede healing if they are in fact suffering PTSD rather than ADHD. I believe, that further research needs to be conducted which specifically looks at this issue, within the Australian context.

Other children in the research such as Beth, Kim, Mary and Tracey displayed signs of some level of depression, with Kim, Betty and Dan also participating in increased risk-taking behaviours. It is of concern that young people such as those mentioned above, often become ‘risk-managed’ within a system, which provides workers with few alternatives in how to casework such behaviours. That Kim and Betty are due to transition from care is thus of concern in terms of their escalating risk-taking behaviours and its effects on their capacity to function in the community independently.

In the main, all children should have some involvement with the education system. How the Education Department deals with aggressive and other difficult behaviours within a particular school, is often left to the discretion of the current School Principal. Undoubtedly, these behaviours can prove challenging to manage. Suspension and expulsion is often utilised in such cases, which can have a negative impact, particularly for children in out of home care. In the case of expulsion the problem behaviour is simply transferred to another school, which can lead to a child attending a multiple of schools, thus further exacerbating a child in care’s sense of insecurity and instability.

This was articulated clearly by Betty in the research:

“I moved around a lot. I went to about ten different schools. I hated it. I got all angry. I just wanted to stay in one spot...it’s hard. I hated changing schools.” (Betty, 17, Indigenous/Anglo, in care)

For Dan, he was using the expulsion and suspension system to earn money at the local take-away, but the behaviour may have dire consequences for his educational outcomes, which were already of concern, as was his interface with the Juvenile Justice system. Summer's experience of attending seventeen schools at the conclusion of this research is testament to the detrimental effects of such instability, which can inhibit positive attachments along with positive educational outcomes.

Also problematic is how funding occurs for children with high needs within the school system. With funding only occurring for children who are given certain diagnoses, other children who may also need extra support can be excluded from receiving these needed services⁴⁹. The same can be said for children funded through Disability Services⁵⁰. Systems that work in isolation it appears are able to perform a level of cost shifting in regards to which department or service bears the financial cost.

In terms of holistic service provision for children in care, funding systems remain problematic. Lack of funding coordination between and across jurisdictions and Government agencies can mean service types are doubled up needlessly, or worse still, are non-existent in some places.

49 Post CMC, the Department introduced Education Plans for all children in out of home care but at the time of writing I am unaware of any published research into the effectiveness and outcomes of this strategy.

50 Queensland however, is the only Australian State that has policy provisions for specialist kinship care for children with special and/or high needs. There are two options: *Specialist Kinship Care* and *Specific Response Care*. For children with moderate to extreme needs *specialist kinship care* is a placement option that enables the child to remain with kin. Additional supports (available as required) include access to therapy, additional casework, support and respite. For children with complex to extreme needs there is the option of *Specific Response Care*, a model of care where a kinship (or foster) carer is employed and paid a wage by a licensed service to provide intensive, therapeutic, home-based full-time care to a child (Child Safety Practice Manual, 2009).

The funding cycle itself is aligned with the financial year and the political cycle, which translates into programs being defunded without rationale and service planning being short-term^{51 52}.

Funding cycles are usually six months to three years in duration. It can also produce a further loss of faith and trust in a system that already historically suffers from an image problem, as highlighted by the Indigenous worker's responses in this research. This lack of faith is likely heightened by the constant changes in name, management and worker turnover within the Department, along with regular negative media coverage.

The Place of the Foster Carers

As evidenced in this research, foster carers play a vital role in the lives of the children in their care. Lara, Andrew, Beth and Alice, who had all lived with the same non-kinship carers from an early age, all displayed a level of positive attachment to their carers. Although for Lara, Andrew and Beth this attachment has been fractured by their carers' respective marriage breakdowns. For other children and young people in the research, such as Betty, Mary, Tracey and Dan, who have all experienced numerous placement changes, positive attachment to anyone remains an issue.

51 An example of the impact on service provision occurred recently (2011) in the NT with service provision to remote communities and the role out of Local Implementation Plans (LIPs). According to the Australian Government website LIPs are described as, 'Through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (RSD), Governments will progressively deliver facilities and services comparable to those which would be expected in any Australian town of similar size, location and need, to an initial set of 29 priority remote Indigenous communities in five jurisdictions (NT, WA, QLD, SA and NSW). To give effect to the RSD National Partnership Agreement in each of the 29 communities, Governments and community members are developing Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) to guide future investment and Government-community cooperation and partnerships in those communities. These plans set out for each community agreed priorities, actions, responsibilities and commitments. The LIPs are living documents which will evolve over time as the various agreed actions are carried out and commitments delivered. So there will be continuing discussion and negotiation with each community about local people's vision for their community's future and how to achieve it, which will be expressed in further iterations.' LIPs. <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/communities/lips/Pages>

52 These plans have a five-year cycle, of issue here is that the political cycle of both State and Federal Governments fall in the middle of this five years. Should either Government be replaced in an election, these plans may well be dishonored. What this means for Aboriginal communities that have signed off on these agreements should not be underestimated given the relationship between Government and communities has become even more problematic as a consequence of the Federal Government Intervention.

Comments made by carers in the research conducted by Thorpe. et. al.(2005), as discussed in Chapter Three, are relevant here in that relationships are important to an abused child's healing process (Perry, 2006). Yet carers highlighted that ongoing relationships between foster carers and children who have left their care, has received opposition from some Department workers who consider such relationships indicative of problem attachment on the part of the carer. I would argue that these relationships should be nurtured if the child so wishes. Tony, Abbey and Dan all spoke of not knowing why they had to change placements, and Ryan felt at odds to understand the Emergency Placement and care contract systems.

"Then I moved in with a foster parent and after that I moved to another foster carer. After that I moved to another one because of the foster carer's contract or something it's like a twenty-eight day thing." (Ryan, 15, non-Indigenous, in care)

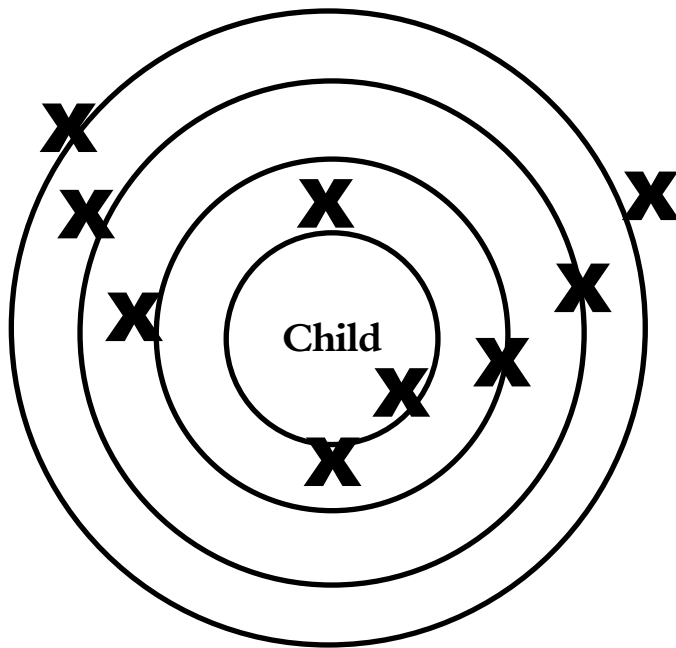
Hence the system itself encourages placement changes particularly in the early stages of intervention. The research highlighted the need to inform children along with documenting these conversations.

Instability was one of the stand-out concerns expressed in meetings with young people in care who asked why it was that they were moved from placement to placement so often (NT Government, 2010).

Circle Informing Practice

In Chapter Eight of the research, the theoretical divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers came to the fore, in that they are working with the same children and families, yet they appear to be working from a different value base. In fact, they appear to be working from a different understanding of key concepts such as identity and identity formation.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, certain theories such as Family Systems Theory can be reworked to incorporate context and specificity to inform how we work with identity in child protection practice. I refer you to the diagram below.



There is potential in this model for adaptation into the child protection context in working with Indigenous children and families. It is vital that information about the child and community in terms of who the key players are in the circles surrounding the child is attained at the onset of intervention. It is also important to understand that, as a child ages, the key players positioning in relation to the child, will likely move and change, hence practice and planning needs also to encompass a level of fluidity. Therapeutically this would involve including certain members of the family and community, at different times, into the therapeutic process. For child protection, such a model would demand culturally informed and timely departmental case planning that considers the potential therapeutic impact of departmental intervention.

Indigenous Department and AICCA workers spoke of the power dynamic inherent in their work place. Stella for example stated:

“See I sort of feel sometimes when we try to say things to the non-Indigenous workers that because they’ve got a degree it’s like a bit of a barrier...like...what would you know?” (Indigenous)

The effect of this power dynamic on service provision may impact negatively upon the children with whom they work, in that case managers are the decision makers in terms of service provision. It is interesting to ponder how children in care may view this power dynamic. Resource issues often demand that CSSO's spend the majority of their work time providing supervised access visits, which they see as inhibitive to providing identity work. This arrangement may also mean that the case manager may rarely attend these contact visits and so is unable to incorporate relevant observations that occur during access, into the ongoing assessment and case planning processes. The subtleties of family dynamics, the body language expressed and the family's capacity for change need ongoing consideration, as does the building of relationship between the CSO and the family.

This model trialed as part of my therapeutic work with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, may be useful here but needs extending to fit the context of child protection work. The model involves a true partnership between the Indigenous worker and the case manager.

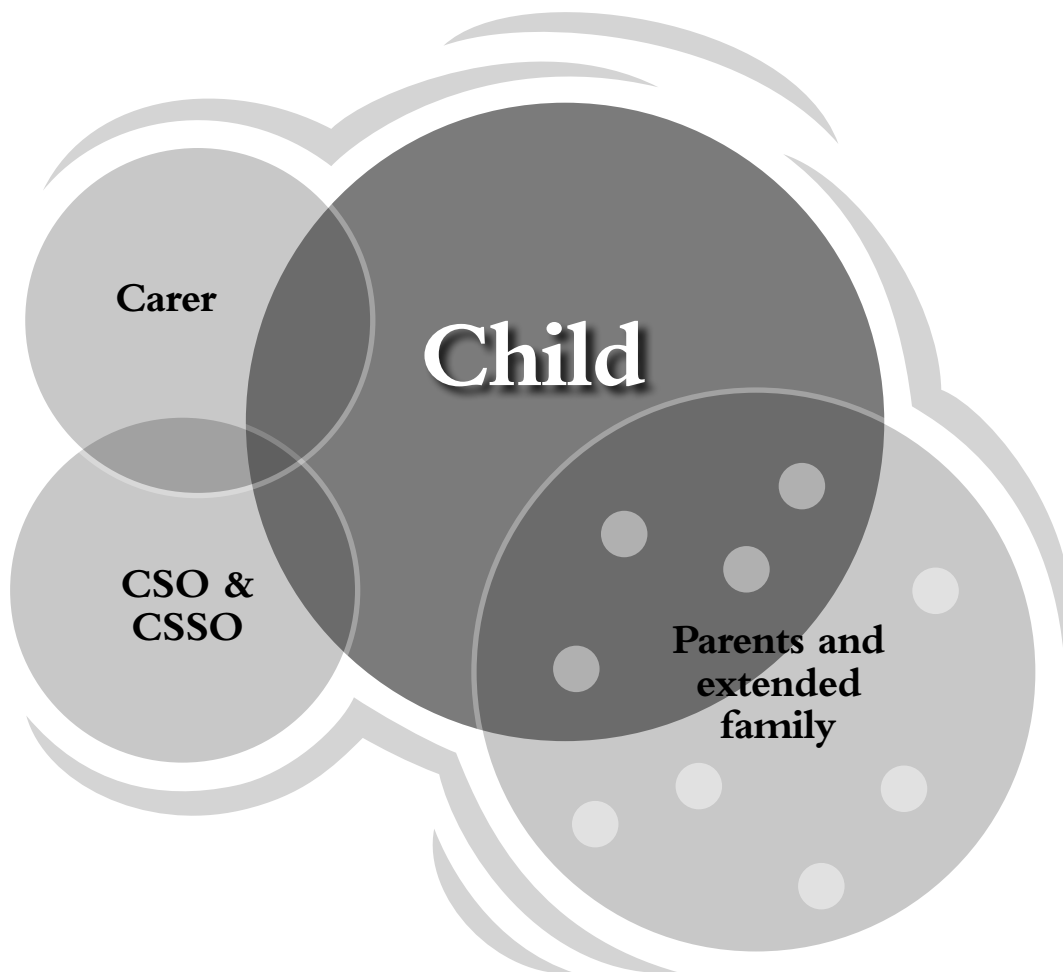
This entails including the CSSO in all decision-making, assessments and case planning processes in regards to the child, and both workers attending access visits and meetings as a team. Undoubtedly this model is more resource intensive, but I would argue that aside from modeling respectful behaviour, it also has potential to help build trust and relationship with the family, which one could argue aids positive casework outcomes. The role of the CSSO is pivotal in providing the bridge between the two and in this way the importance of Indigenous knowledge is recognised.

The Testro survey confirms this position in that he found there was a, 'lack of understanding about the role of CSSO who tended to be used solely for access visits, lack of acknowledgement in regards to their cultural knowledge and a lack of commitment by some managers to give effect to the role' (2010, p. 29).

Paradigm Shift

The diagram below transposes the family systems diagram above onto a working model that puts the child in the centre.

The child here is in the centre. In the case of kinship care (where appropriate), where the carer is linked into the extended family, they would form part of the inner circle of the extended family. The model demands dialogue and mutual respect between stakeholders but most of all, it proposes that the rhetoric of '*being in the best interest of the child*' be superseded by the inclusion of the child. Martin's Aboriginal Model of identity formation discussed in Chapter Three, highlighted the differences in how Aboriginal people view childhood as compared with Western Anglo constructs such as Developmental Theory.



Aboriginal children are considered capable, autonomous and active contributors from an early age. Hence Aboriginal constructs of childhood and spirit could easily be incorporated into this model. The model also has the potential to be fluid enough to be relevant to Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander families, although further research needs to occur to ensure that this is the case.

The model would demand a systemic rethink that simplifies and streamlines interstate information exchange processes and carer registration processes. It would enable extended family to be involved from the onset of intervention. The diagram also recognises the carer and the need for all stakeholders to work in partnership. The supportive kinship care assessment model and *Family Group Conferencing*, as discussed earlier are both in keeping with the collaborative underpinning of the model. It recognises that without extended family engagement, the avenues to build family capacity can be seriously depleted.

Testro suggests that for those children not placed with extended family, regular (every 3 months) family group meetings occur as a mechanism to review case plans and monitor the Department's adherence to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle* (2010).

In contrast to the current child protection system in Queensland, the proposed systems approach is about flexibility within a framework of engagement with clear plans and goals that incorporates identity, connection and cultural knowledge at its core.

This framework of engagement could also be utilised in other areas of concern, such as how high-risk children and young people are “*risk-managed*” within the system. Here too a new model needs to be derived and informed by major stakeholders such as Create, Youth Justice and the Recognised Entity.

The literature is clear that specific needs exist for Indigenous children as members of a minority community within an often racist society (Bamblett, Frederico, Harrison, Jackson & Lewis, 2009). The importance of a strong cultural identity can help counteract this racism.

The term “*in the best interest of the child*” also needs a re-think in how we apply it and given the historical context of the term, perhaps the alternative term needs to reflect a child’s wellbeing. In a recent study by Long and Sephton, Victorian Aboriginal participants spoke of Aboriginal child-rearing practices as being “*the way.*” “*It’s a nurturing of bringing up children. You’re not imposing what you want them to be, you’re nurturing them to who they are meant to be*” (2011, p. 104).

This concept is coupled with the concept of the “*wound*” or “*introduced destroyers of culture*” such as drugs, alcohol and historical trauma (Long & Sephton, 2011, p. 106). ‘Distinguishing between “*the Way*” and “*the Wound*” along with what is appropriate in a traditional and urban setting in the eyes of the Aboriginal workers interviewed, provided the basis for deciding what was actually in the best interest of the child’ (Long & Sephton, 2011, p. 107).

There is no doubt that some families that become known to the Department are so fractured, that returning the child/ren would put the child/ren at risk however, I would argue that an increased emphasis on early intervention utilising a collaborative model of practice could help counteract the entrenchment of behaviours in many cases. Identity work needs to become imbedded within the model and be made explicit.

The therapeutic possibilities within child protection practice also need consideration. Healing for traumatised children does not just occur in isolation within the counselling space, it can also occur through positive relationships.

Here we have an example of the distinct ideologies referred to by Lonne and Thomson (2005), who argue that the political and managerialist discourse is at odds with the professionally focused practice of the people who are actually working with families in child protection. Lonne and Thomson argue that these practice-based workers are fearful and resistant to authority. I would argue that many workers experience the managerialist approach as the ethical anti-thesis of client-based work, which, arguably is at the heart of Social Work practice. For there to truly be a shift in culture in the way we work with families in the child protection system, the same dynamic of collaboration needs to be reflected in the workplace, between workers within child protection and with other stakeholders.

It is important to consider what such a shift would demand in terms of cultural change. An Australian Institute of Family Studies Report found that the degree in which organisations adopt new approaches varies markedly (2008). A literature review that looked at the degree in which innovations are introduced into child protection services and using *Family Group Conferencing* as an example, found that, ‘weak leadership, the decentralised structure of child welfare provision, limited resources, weak evaluation research, and conflict with pre-existing structures and beliefs, have all contributed to a situation in which conferencing remains on the margins of child protection practice in the United Kingdom’ (Brown, 2003, p. 6).

Thus research indicates that the crisis, forensic and administrative driven model of child protection is at odds with a collaborative, supportive framework. Incorporating systems such as *Family Group Conferencing* in Queensland can perhaps provide the veneer of collaboration, whilst retaining the power relationship inherent within a managerialist-based approach. A fractured workplace, as described by the adult Indigenous respondents in this research, does not augur well for the sometimes fractured and troubled families who become involved in the Child Protection system.

Identity work within the child protection context is complex work. Unless there is some commitment by child protection services to provide the resources specifically for this work, and also acknowledge other cultural value bases, which incorporate these values into practice, children in care will continue to leave care disconnected from their cultural heritage, family, community and ultimately the self.

An African proverb states that, “*It takes a whole village to raise a child.*” As the legally appointed guardian and leader within the child in care’s village, the Department workers and the children and families they work with may benefit from such a paradigm shift. Rather than Department workers viewing themselves as being an ‘outside monitor’ of the circles surrounding the child, perhaps it is time to step inside the circle where true dialogue and collaboration are more likely to occur.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pictorial explanation of art group

Appendix B: Letter to carers and parents

Appendix C: Information sheet for cares/parents

Appendix D: Information Sheets participants

Appendix E and F: Consent forms

Appendix G: Survey Tool

Appendix H: Informed consent for workers

Appendix I: Identity research information collection sheet

Appendix J: Worker question prompt sheet

Appendix K: Group Rules

Appendix L: Feeling cards

Note: The original appendix documents were created in an old microsoft word format which could not be enhanced during formatting of the final version of this thesis.

Appendix A: Pictorial explanation of art group



Appendix B: Letter to carers and parents

Dear,

I am currently a PhD student with James Cook University. My research looks at the issue of identity for children in foster care. The research includes conducting art workshops with children to include their views in formulating a new model of practice in how child protection workers work with children in foster care around this issue.

An art group will be held for children 8-11 years of age and this is scheduled to take place on the morning of Monday the 17th of January. Please find enclosed a copy of the information sheet and consent form. These sheets are devised in order to inform the children and to ensure informed consent. In line with ethical considerations I would like to discuss with you the possibility of R..... and A..... to attend the art group. I would like to call you prior to the groups to meet with you to discuss the research and to meet with R..... and A..... to talk about the art groups.

Yours faithfully,

Michelle Moss
BA(Hons.), MA., AATR

Appendix C: Information sheet for cares/parents

Information Sheet

PROJECT: A Different Identity: An exploration of Identity and Subjectivity
for Children in Care

I am a PhD student at James Cook University. I am conducting research into how children and young people in foster care view their identity and subjectivity with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander children. The research will look at children and young people's views and will incorporate the views of community members and Departmental workers. The information will be used to inform policy and practices within the Department of Child Safety and ultimately improve and strengthen practice standards for children in care.

What is involved?

- ❖ I will arrange to meet with the young person and the carer/parent in order to explain the research and ensure informed consent.
- ❖ I will arrange an interview time with the child/young person and their carers/parents.
- ❖ Interviews will be child and young people focused to encourage participation and the young people are not obliged to use the art materials.

- ❖ Follow up interviews will be conducted the following year.

Where does the information go?

All information is confidential and private. All identifying information given by you or the

young person will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and accessible only to the researcher.

What happens now?

It is important that you are satisfied that I have explained all aspects of the research to you

and the young person.

If you agree, I will ask that you and or the young person sign a consent form. This will confirm that:

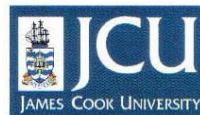
- ❖ You have been informed in detail about the research;
- ❖ You agree to participate freely;
- ❖ You are aware that you may without being asked to give reason, end your participation at any time in the research if you wish.

If you would like to ask any questions before, during or after the research about your participation you can contact me as detailed below. If, during the research you are concerned about any ethical issues you can contact Tina Langford, Ethics Administrator, James Cook University on 47 814343.

Ms Michelle Moss

Phone: (07) 49575851

Appendix D: Information Sheets for participants



Info Sheet

Michelle Moss has got together with James Cook University to do a project on how children and young people get to know who they are, what is important to them and what Department of Child Safety workers can do to make sure these important things don't get forgotten. This project is about listening to what children and young people really think. Michelle will have some art materials for you to use if you want. If you agree to participate you will be asked to sign an agreement form.

What YOU think is Important!

What it mean if I agree?

Michelle will arrange to meet with you and you will be invited to make some art if you want to. What you say is a secret, meaning noone will ever know that you said or made that stuff. You will be in charge in that you can ask to stop at any time or you can decide not to share whenever you wish. If you get upset, feel sad, scared or angry you can count on support and special help.

What happens to my artwork?

You will need to leave the artwork with Michelle to make sure it is dry. Michelle will take photos of your art.

When you meet with Michelle later you will get your artwork back. The art is yours and you can keep it where ever you like.

QUESTIONS?????

When Michelle arranges to meet with you she can answer questions you might have.

Appendix E: Consent form



Agreement Sheet

What YOU think is Important!

The art and talks with Michelle are to find more about who you are and what is important to you.

My name is.....and I know what the talks with Michelle are about. I know that I can pull out whenever I want and I can say "NO" whenever I want I know that if I don't want to, I don't have to take part or say and do stuff. I know that if I say and do stuff that no one will know it was me that said it.



My signature

..... Date.....

My parent's or carer's signature

..... Date.....

Witness by interviewer or carer.

Name:.....Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix F: Consent Form



Agreement Sheet

What YOU think is important!

The art and talks are to find out more about who you are and what is important to you. This project involved making some art if I wish and talking with Michelle. I know that I can pull out at any time and I can say "no" whenever I want. I know that if I talk about stuff that noone will know it was me that said it. The aims of the study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I understand that a tape recorder will be used during the meeting.

Consent Bit

NAME(Printed).....

Signature.....Date.....

Witness by Researcher Obtaining Consent

NAME.....

Signature.....Date.....

Appendix G: Survey Tool

Identity Questionnaire

My cultural group is?.....

My mother's cultural group is?.....

My father's cultural group is?.....

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) STRONGLY AGREE

(3) AGREE

(2) DISAGREE

(1) STRONGLY DISAGREE

- 1- I know about my cultural group
- 2- I know the history and customs of my cultural group.....
- 3- I am involved in social groups with people from my culture.....
- 4- I know about my background and what it means to me.....
- 5- I think a lot about how my life is effected by my culture.....
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my culture.....
- 7- I understand pretty well what my cultural group membership means to me
- 8- In order to learn about my culture I have talked to other people about it.....
- 9- I am proud to belong to my culture
- 10- I participate in cultural practices like special foods, music and customs.....
- 11- I feel strongly about my culture
- 12- I feel good about my culture

I have heard the word identity before yes/no

Identity to me is about.....
.....
.....
.....
;

Scale

In the spaces provided :

Enter a 1 if you definitely disagree with the statement

Enter a 2 if you mostly disagree with the statement

Enter a 3 if you neither agree or disagree with the statement

Enter a 4 if you mostly agree with the statement

Enter a 5 if you definitely agree with the statement

- 1. Before going out in public, I always notice how I look**
- 2.I am careful to buy clothes that will make me look my best**
- 3.I would pass most physical- fitness tests**
- 4.It is important that I have superior strength**
- 5.My body is sexually appealing**
- 6.I am not involved in a regular exercise program**
- 7.I am in control of my health**

- 8.I know a lot about things that effect my physical health
.....
- 9.I have deliberately developed a healthy lifestyle
10. I constantly worry about being or becoming fat
.....
11. I like my looks just the way they are
12.I check my appearance in the mirror all the time
13. Before going out, I always spend a lot of time getting ready
.....
- 14.My physical endurance is good
15. Participating in sports is not important to me
16. I do not actively do things to keep fit
17. My health is a matter of unexpected ups and downs
18. Good health is one of the most important things in my life
19. I don't do anything that I know might hurt my health
.....
- 20 I am very aware of even small weight changes
21. Most people would think that I am good looking
22. It is important that I always look good
23. I use very few grooming products
24.I learn physical skills easily
25.being fit is not a big priority in my life
26. I do stuff to increase my physical strength
27. I am seldom ill
28.I take my health for granted
29. I like the way I look without me clothes on
30. I am self-conscious if my grooming isn't right
31. I usually wear whatever is handy without caring how it looks....
32.I do badly at physical sports and games
33. I don't think much about my athletic skills

34. From day to day I never know how my body will feel
.....
35. If I am sick I don't pay much attention to my symptoms
36. I eat whatever I want
40. I eat fast-food all the time
41. I like the way my clothes fit me
42. I don't care what people think about the way I look
43. I take special care when I fix my hair
44. I dislike my physique
45. I can't be bothered to improve my physical fitness
46. I get sick all the time
47. I pay close attention to my body for signs of illness
48. I am physically unattractive
49. I never think about how I look
50. I play sport regularly
51. I am on a weight loss diet
55. I binge drink all the time
56. I use drugs all the time
57. I have tried to lose weight by fasting or going on crash diets
1.Never 3. Sometimes 5.very often
2.Rarely 4.Often
58. I think I am:
1.Very underweight
2.Somewhat underweight
3.Normal weight
4. Somewhat overweight
5.Very overweight
60. From looking at me, most people would think I am:
1.Very underweight
2.Somewhat underweight

3.Normal weight

4. Somewhat overweight

5.Very overweight

Use scale from 1-5 to show how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with each of the following areas of your body.

1-Very dissatisfied

3.Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

2.Mostly dissatisfied

4.Mostly satisfied

5.Very satisfied

My face.....

My hair.....

Lower torso (buttocks,hips,thighs, legs).....

Mid torso (waist,stomach).....

Upper torso (chest, breasts, shoulders, arms).....

Muscle tone.....

Height.....

Weight.....

General appearance.....

In the blank space, Enter 1 if you strongly agree

Enter a 2 if you agree

Enter a 3 if you disagree

Enter a 4 if you strongly disagree

.....I feel that I am a person of worth and equal to others

.....I feel that I have a number of good qualities

.....All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure

.....I am able to do things as well as most people

.....I feel I do not have much to be proud of

.....I feel positive about myself
.....On the whole, I am happy with myself
.....I wish I could respect myself more
.....I really feel useless at times
.....Sometimes I feel that I am no good at all

Appendix H: Informed consent for workers

To be printed on JCU letterhead
Informed Consent Form
SCHOOL: Social Work and Community Welfare
PROJECT: A Different Identity: An exploration of Identity and Subjectivity for Children in Care
Chief Investigator: Michelle Moss
Contact Details: (07) 49515900
Details of Consent: This project involves conducting focus groups with community members who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander. Each group will involve 5 adults and include elders, carers, parents of children in care and young adults to discuss identity and subjectivity. The groups will be semi-structured in order to encourage people's stories about their experiences to emerge. Individual interviews will also be offered should you wish to explore the issue further. Further detailed information about the research is in the attached Information Sheet which should be carefully read before signing the consent form.
The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.
I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.
I also understand that a tape recorder will be used to record the interviews.
Name: (printed)..... Signature: Date:
WITNESS BY RESEARCHER OBTAINING CONSENT
Name: (printed)..... Signature: Date:

Appendix I: Identity research information collection sheet

Identity Research Information Sheet			
Date			
Client number			
Sheet 1	of		
Name	Code Number	1R	
Age	Sex	f	Cultural Background
			Mother Anglo, Father – Aboriginal NSW
Family Background			
Include origin, genogram and family structure			
Placement type and length -			
Length of time in care			
Age when coming into care			
Number of placements			
Number of schools			
Attended counselling for identity issues-			
CP concerns			
Siblings			
Number of siblings in care -			
Placement/contact details			

Parent contact

Type/quality /frequency

Family dynamics

Contact with extended family and culture

CARE SITUATION AND DYNAMICS

Other information and source

Appendix J: Worker question prompt sheet

Worker Question Sheet

Do you think identity is important?

Define identity.

How is identity formed?

What influences identity?

What's your view about identity and children in care?

What theory bases do you use in your work when dealing with identity issues?

In practice how do you deal with these issues?

Do you think different issues face indigenous children in young people in regards to identity?

Appendix K: Group Rules

GROUP RULES

- 1. What other kids say or do in the group won't be talked about when I leave the group.**
- 2. Everyone has a right to feel safe.**
- 3. I can leave the group at any time.**
- 4. If I need to leave the group I won't leave the building and I will speak to Michelle before I leave.**
- 5. I don't have to share what I think if I don't want to.**
- 6. If I feel yukky I will tell Michelle or another adult here.**
- 7. Today I can choose first to play a game, make some art for about 40 mins and then to talk about the art afterwards.**

Appendix L: Feeling cards

