

2026

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**Our Booris, Our Way Review – Six
monthly update (July to December 2025)**

**Michael Pettersson MLA
Minister for Children, Youth and Families
June 2026**

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update

July-December 2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The ACT Government acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

The ACT government would also like to acknowledge the value of traditional parenting practices and communal culture in child rearing. In particular, grandparents, aunts, and uncles hold a significant and respected position in families and play a vital role in the development of a child or young person's sense of identity, belonging and culture.

We believe that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a strength and protective factor in our work with families. We also understand that for thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, families and communities have provided safe, strong, and loving care for their children, based on cultural wisdom, shared knowledge and traditions which uphold the belief that children have a sacred value to their community.

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Abbreviations

ACCA	Aboriginal Child Care Association
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AMC	Alexander Maconochie Centre
ATSICPP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle
CAPO	Care and Protection Organisation
CPLAS	Care and Protection Legal Advocacy Service
CPP	Children's Placement Principle
CSP	Children's Services Program
CST	Cultural Services Team
CYF	Children, Youth and Families
CYFSP	Children, Young People and Family Services Program
CYP Act	Children and Young People Act 2008
CYPS	Children and Youth Protection System
CYRIS	CYPS Client Information System
DDTS	Digital, Data and Technology Services
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
EPR	Enduring Parental Responsibility
FGC	Family Group Conferencing
FNFST	First Nations Family Support Team
HCSD	Health and Community Services Directorate
JACS	Justice and Community Safety
MBS	Medical Benefit Scheme
NBHF	Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm
OBOWIOC	Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee
OBOW	Our Booris, Our Way
PDT	HCSD CYPS Practice and Development Team
RFP	Request for Proposal
SB-HSC	Strategic Board Human Services Committee
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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Minister Foreword

Minister Michael Pettersson

I am pleased to present this Our Booris, Our Way 6 monthly implementation update, covering the period from July to December 2025.

Our Booris, Our Way remains a critical change driver for the ACT, grounded in the principle of self-determination and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. It reflects our shared commitment to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care (OOHC), and to ensure they grow up safe, connected to culture, and supported by strong families and communities.

This report highlights how our partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is supporting continued progress. It demonstrates our efforts to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle across policy, practice and training, strengthen cultural safety, and centre family led decision making within our child protection system.

Over this reporting period, we have seen important achievements. The First Nations Family Response and Engagement Unit continues to play a critical leadership role, delivering culturally informed responses that support families earlier and reduce the need for intrusive child protection interventions. We have strengthened workforce capability through targeted recruitment, leadership development and the establishment of a comprehensive training package to embed the Child Placement Principle in everyday practice.

We are also improving how we engage families and communities. Expanded access to Family Group Conferencing is ensuring families are central to decisions that affect their children, including cultural planning and pathways to restoration. In parallel, we are progressing work to strengthen culturally appropriate advocacy and legal support services, recognising the importance of empowering families as they navigate the child protection system.

Importantly, this report shows our continued investment in early support and prevention. Initiatives such as the 3 year old development check pilot, strengthened early childhood education programs, and community led responses to family violence demonstrate our commitment to addressing challenges before they escalate. These efforts—alongside ongoing investment in culturally safe healing, mental health and family support services—are critical to achieving long term change.

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While progress is evident, we know there is more to do. As of 31 December 2025, there were 223 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in OOHC in the ACT. This underscores the importance of ongoing reform, including sustained efforts to strengthen kinship care, expand Aboriginal Community Controlled services (ACCOs), and progress legislative changes to fully embed the Child Placement Principle.

In February 2026, the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council and Community Services Ministers came together in a joint meeting for the first time. Ministers met to discuss accelerating urgent work to reduce the number of children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV) and change the trajectory of children and young people at risk of entering OOHC around the country.

This joint national work to better integrate responses across our child and family systems will strengthen a more connected, holistic system that addresses risk and protective factors together, enabling earlier support and healing for children, young people and their families.

Alongside Our Booris, Our Way, this will mean stronger, culturally informed, community-led responses, particularly through investment in ACCOs, to help our children grow up safe, supported and connected to family, culture and community.

The ACT Government remains steadfast in its commitment to work in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to deliver these reforms. This includes supporting the growth of the ACCO sector and ensuring decision making is increasingly led by community.

I thank the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, community leaders, ACCOs and frontline workers across the ACT for their ongoing dedication and leadership. Your work is fundamental to creating a child protection system that is culturally safe, accountable, and centred on the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

Together, we will continue to deliver on the vision of Our Booris, Our Way, a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are supported to thrive, connected to culture, and raised strong in their families and communities.

Chairperson Foreword

Natalie Brown

When the Our Booris, Our Way review delivered its final recommendations, it established a definitive blueprint for structural reform and a clear mandate to decolonise the child protection system.

From its inception, our primary focus has been firmly anchored in early intervention and prevention strategies. These frameworks are intentionally designed to safely preserve family units and prevent children from entering the formal out-of-home care system. Central to this mission is a foundational commitment to Aboriginal-led decision-making and the strategic expansion of Aboriginal-controlled organisations—ensuring that our community retains design, delivery, and self-determining authority over the systems that directly impact our lives.



As Chair of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, I acknowledge this progress report, compiled by government directorates to detail their actions against our recommendations. The Committee's role is to provide independent, rigorous oversight of these initiatives, working collaboratively with government to ensure that policy intentions translate into measurable, positive outcomes for our children and families. Moving forward from 2026, the Committee will further strengthen institutional accountability by releasing our own independent implementation status assessment reports.

An objective review of this reporting period demonstrates that progress is being achieved, though it does not yet move with the necessary velocity. We acknowledge the tangible outcomes resulting from the genuine dedication of Ministers, public servants, and community partners. Notably, there has been a measurable increase in children safely returning home to their families, alongside an essential expansion of Aboriginal-led decision-making mechanisms within the statutory framework. Furthermore, we recognize key achievements including improved completion rates for annual health assessments, enhanced practical support for kinship carers, and secured ongoing funding for vital legal services in care and protection matters. These milestones represent significant advancements that directly enhance the well-being of our community.

However, while we acknowledge these positive developments, we must also emphasize that the comprehensive decolonisation of public institutions requires sustained, unrelenting momentum.

Ensuring robust, accessible, and early supports for children and families, alongside establishing mechanisms for permanent, independent advocacy for kinship and family carers, must remain an absolute priority. Our families cannot continue to carry the disproportionate weight of care without the systemic, structural backing they rightfully deserve. Crucially, this backing must include a sophisticated, well-resourced response to family violence. Addressing family violence is a critical prerequisite for children's safety; we cannot achieve genuine, long-term preservation of family units without proactively mitigating these harms through culturally safe, healing-informed, and preventative interventions.

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To that end, the Committee views the increasing reliance on residential care for young people with grave concern. There is an urgent, critical need to develop alternative accommodation models, specifically Aboriginal-led, child-centred, and culturally secure options.

Addressing this accommodation shortfall is also intrinsically linked to mitigating the deeply concerning rise of young people in detention and improving their experiences within the justice system. Currently, a significant proportion of young people remain in custody awaiting a formal hearing, or are held on remand due to a lack of suitable, supported bail accommodation. This intersection of housing instability and youth justice intervention requires immediate rectification.

Additionally, the Committee remains deeply concerned by worsening trends in school engagement. While we acknowledge that several targeted educational initiatives are currently being implemented to support our young people, the systemic persistence of disengagement highlights the limitations of overlaying programs onto existing structures.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that educational frameworks designed and delivered entirely by our community achieve outcomes that far exceed mainstream institutional offerings. Self-determination in education is a well-established precedent; diverse cultural groups, international communities, and faith-based organisations successfully operate their own independent schools and systemic networks within the Australian Capital Territory. Establishing equivalent, culturally grounded educational infrastructure for our children is a vital component of long-term systemic reform.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the members of the Implementation Oversight Committee. The rigorous oversight, advocacy, and guidance detailed in these pages are only possible because of their ongoing commitment. Every member continues to generously dedicate their time, their expertise, and their profound love for our community to this vital work. It is an honour to lead a committee so fiercely dedicated to securing a just and self-determining future for our children.

Ultimately, achieving the full intent of the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations cannot be viewed as the sole responsibility of a single agency. The systemic issues confronting our children—spanning housing, justice, health, education, and family safety—are deeply interconnected. True reform demands a whole-of-government approach. It is imperative that all directorates across the ACT Government dismantle traditional bureaucratic silos and come together in a unified, coordinated effort. Only through collective accountability, shared resources, and a synchronized commitment across all arms of government

Executive Summary

The ACT Government continues to implement the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way final report to guide policy and practice aimed at addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care.

In response to community feedback calling for improved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander oversight beyond initial engagement points, the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Unit has continued to support culturally safe practices across Family Group Conferencing (FGC), Family Finding, and Family Connection and Restoration teams.

Children, Youth and Families (CYF) also focused on strengthening workforce capability through the development of an updated internal training package to support implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP), building on previous collaboration with SNAICC to strengthen the application of the 5 ATSICPP elements within practice.

Improvements to referral pathways and cultural planning processes have also been implemented. A revised FGC referral process is now in place, including early referrals when a child is at risk of coming into care and direct referrals from the Cultural Planning Team following a child or young person's entry into care, to support earlier engagement with families in decision making and cultural connection. An agreement implemented in September 2025 ensures that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child eligible for a Cultural Plan is referred to FGC, strengthening consultation, participation, partnership and cultural connection in the development of Cultural Plans.

The Health and Community Services Directorate (HCSD) has progressed initial work to explore service delivery options for a culturally appropriate advocacy function for carers and families engaging with child, youth and family safety services.

Investment in workforce development and sector capability has also continued. CYF delivered targeted training to strengthen culturally responsive and father-inclusive practice, supporting greater recognition of the role of fathers, grandfathers and extended family members in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

In addition, the Strong Beginnings Aboriginal Educator Network was launched on 13 November 2025 as part of the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarships Program. The network provides a dedicated forum for Aboriginal educators to connect, access professional development and contribute to a more culturally informed early childhood education and care sector, with 12 educators attending the inaugural gathering.

The progress made in this reporting period reflects our continued commitment to strengthening culturally safe and informed practice, and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

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Recommendation Progress as of December 2025

Rec 1:* Allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cases to experienced and culturally intelligent case workers.	Rec 2: Engagement of SNAICC for training on embedding Child Placement Principle	Rec 3: Policy and practice review to explicitly embed the Child Placement Principle	Rec 4: Universal access to family group conferencing
Rec 5: Ensure full intent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is reflected in the Children and Young People Act 2008	Rec 6:* Feasibility study Aboriginal Child Care Association	Rec 8 (A): Culturally appropriate advocate service	Rec 9: Early support programs available Rec 9 (A): Accessible and appropriate early support programs for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, and trauma
Rec 10 (A): Access to supports for kinship carers Rec 10 (B)(I) & (II): Kinship care assessment process	Rec 7: Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner	Rec 8 (B): Access to legal representation and advocacy	Rec 15: Governance and oversight of implementation of recommendations
Rec 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and leadership	Rec 11 (A) & (B):* Improve quality and monitoring of cultural plans	Rec 13:* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice	Rec 16: Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision making in child protection
Rec 18: Support development of the cultural services team	Rec 12: Pathways to restoration	Rec 14:* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments	Rec 22 (B): Children moved to CYPs
Rec 23:* Wreck Bay	Rec 19: Appropriate identification, and de-identification, of children	Rec 21: ACT Indigenous Procurement Policy	Rec 22 (C): Fostered by ACT Together managed by CYPs
Rec 24: Appoint a project team to implement recommendations and monitor practice change	Rec 20: Segmentation and data on kinship care	Rec 22 (A): Framework for ACT Together case work	Rec 27: Active referrals and follow-up
	Rec 25: Data collection and analysis	Rec 26(A): Adoption and permanency arrangements Rec 26(B): Enduring parental responsibility orders	Rec 28: Family connection practices
Key High Focus Medium Focus Monitoring Phase			

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Introduction

This tenth progress report provides an overview of the actions undertaken between July and December 2025 as part of the ACT Government's continued commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way review.

In 2017, the ACT Government commissioned a review into the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out of home care system.

The wholly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Our Booris, Our Way Steering Committee led the co-design and delivery of the review in line with the ACT Government's commitment to self-determination.

The review took a systemic approach to examining the child protection system, with the aim of identifying how to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, ensure children remain connected to their community and culture, and support parents and families to safely care for their children.

The final report, presented in December 2019, included 28 recommendations and 8 sub-recommendations (36 in total) to guide reform of the ACT child protection system over a two-year period.

The ACT Government remains committed to working in partnership with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to fully implement the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way report.

This report provides an update for each recommendation on the key activities and outcomes during the reporting period July to December 2025 and describes the planned focus of ACT Government directorates in the next 6 months.

Our Booris Today

What the data tells us

As of 31 December 2025, there were 223 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care.

Of the 223 children and young people¹:

- 110 children and young people (50 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (with care residing with the Director General)
- 44 children and young people (20 per cent) were on Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)
- 45 children and young people (21 per cent) were on Short-term orders (< 2 years)
- 14 children and young people (6 per cent) were on Interim Orders or Emergency Actions
- 5 children and young people (2 per cent) had no care and protection orders in place (over 18 post care supported placements)²
- 1 child or young person (0 per cent) was on a Voluntary Care Arrangement.

Table 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by order type as of December 2019 and December 2025

	As at 31 December 2019		As at 31 December 2025	
Order Type¹	248		219	
Long term orders (with DG)	182	73%	110	50%
Long-term Orders (3rd Party Parental Responsibility)	30	12%	44	20%
Short-term orders (< 2 years)	18	7%	45	21%
Interim Orders or Emergency Actions	14	6%	14	6%
No Care and Protection orders (over 19 post care-placements)²	4	2%	5	2%
Voluntary Care Arrangements	0	0%	1	0%

Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) -25 Quarterly Snapshots

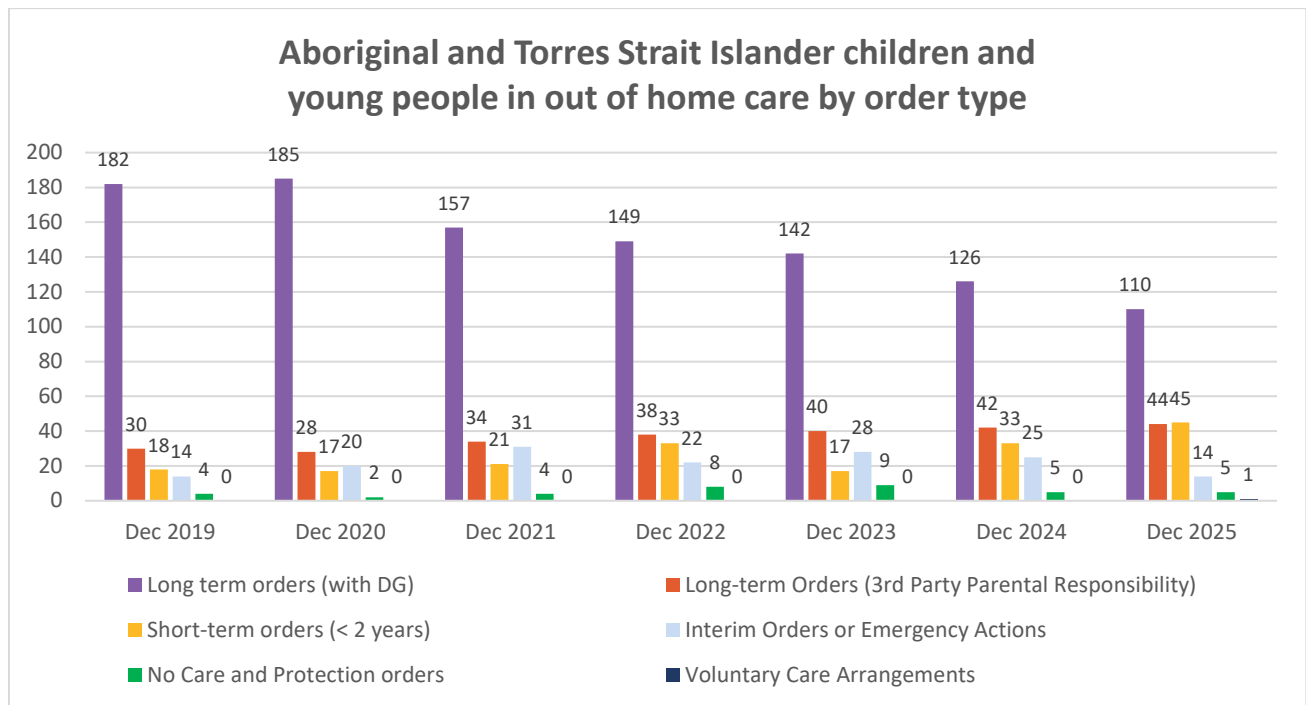
¹ The sum of the order type categories may not equal the total of all children and young people living in out of home care as a child or young person may have multiple orders while in out of home care.

² This category includes young people aged 18 years-old and above who are living in post-care supported placements

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Figure 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on Child Protection orders, by order type from December 2019 to December 2025



Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - 2025 Quarterly Snapshots

Of the 223 children and young people living in out of home care as of 31 December 2025¹:

- 118 (53 per cent) were a kinship care placement (please see Figure 3 for a breakdown of kinship care);
- 39 (17 per cent) were a foster care placement;
- 19 (8 per cent) were an Ex-Kinship Enduring Parental Responsibility placement;
- 25 (11 per cent) were an Ex-Foster Enduring Parental Responsibility placement;
- 7 (3 per cent) were a residential care placement; and
- 16 (7 per cent) were other placement types.

Table 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as of 31 December 2019 and 31 December 2025

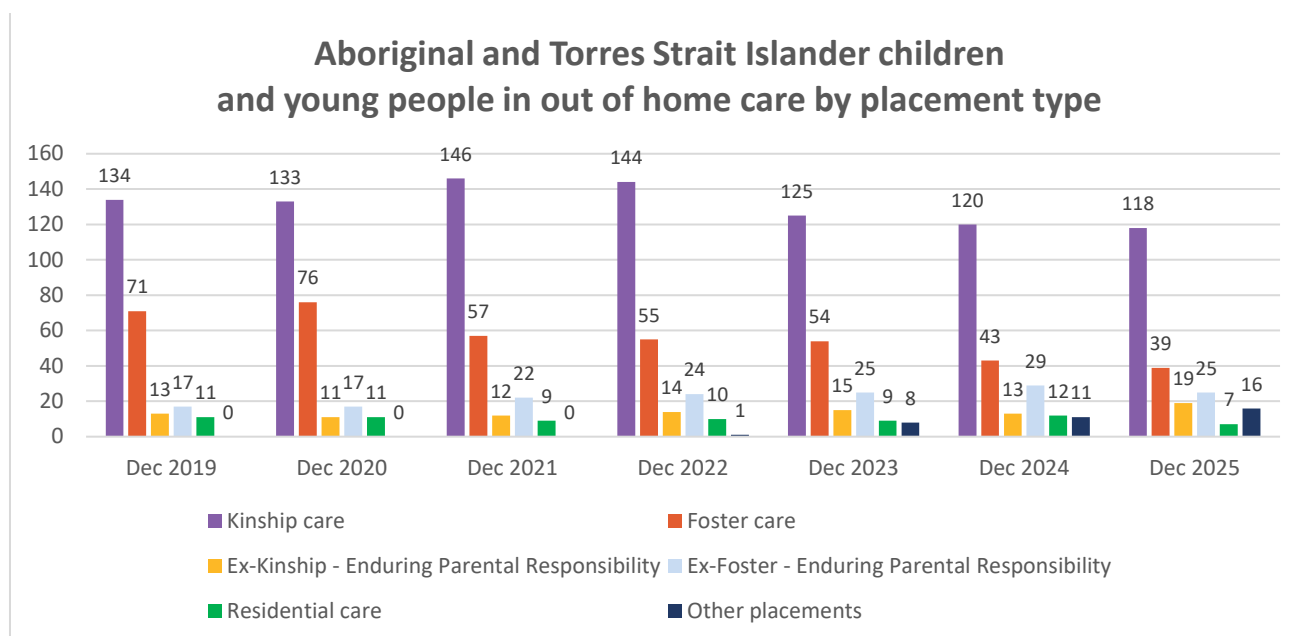
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	As at 31 December 2019		As at 31 December 2025	
Placement Type¹	246		224	
Kinship Care	134	53%	118	53%
Foster care	71	30%	39	17%
Ex-Kinship - Enduring Parental Responsibility	13	5%	19	8%
Ex-Foster – Enduring Parental Responsibility	17	6%	25	11%
Residential care	11	5%	7	3%
Other Placements	0	0%	16	7%

Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - 2025 Quarterly Snapshots

Figure 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care, by placement type as of 31 December 2019 and 31 December 2025



Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - 2025 Quarterly Snapshots

¹ The sum of the placement type categories may not equal the total of all children and young people living in out of home care as a child or young person may have multiple placements while in out of home care.

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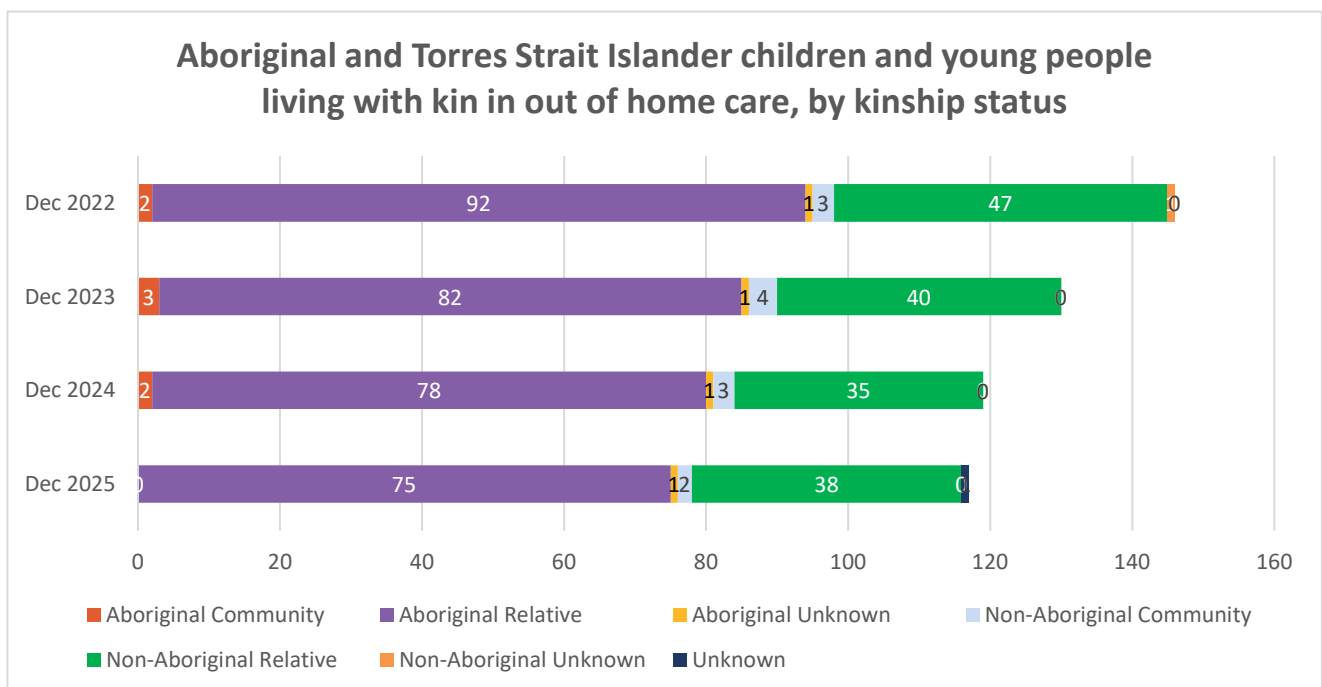
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Figure 3 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from December 2022 to December 2025

	As at 31 December 2022		As at 31 December 2025	
Carer Status¹	146		117	
Aboriginal Community	2	1%	0	0%
Aboriginal Relative	92	63%	75	64%
Aboriginal Unknown	1	1%	1	1%
Non-Aboriginal Community	3	2%	2	2%
Non-Aboriginal Relative	47	32%	38	32%
Non-Aboriginal Unknown	1	1%	0	0%
Unknown	0	0%	1	1%

Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Operational Data²

Figure 3 – Carer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status of children and young people in kinship care from December 2022 to December 2025



Data Source: The Child and Youth Record Information System (CYRIS) - Operational Data²

¹ The sum of the carer status categories may not equal the total of all children and young people living in out of home care as a child or young person may have multiple placements while in out of home care.

² Content is based on data in CYRIS at particular points in time. Due to its operational nature, data within CYRIS is subject to change.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cases to experienced and culturally intelligent case workers

That allocation of cases involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are prioritised with a dedicated and experienced team of child protection workers with demonstrated cultural awareness and willingness to work with the community.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The well-established First Nations Family Response and Engagement Unit comprises Appraisals and Support Responses, the Family Group Conferencing Team, the Family Finding Team, and the Family Connection and Restoration Team.

This Unit is led by the now permanent First Nations Senior Director, with one Aboriginal Operations Manager with direct oversight of the Appraisal and Support Response Teams, and another Aboriginal Operations Manager having direct oversight of the Family Group Conferencing, Family Finding, and Family Connection and Restoration Teams.

Following consultation with community to address their feedback of needing First Nations oversight across the floor at CYF, and not just at the front end, the Unit continues to implement and support culturally safe practices with families engaged with CYF.

The unit currently comprises of:

- Aboriginal Senior Director.
- 2 Aboriginal Operations Managers.
- 1 Aboriginal Team Leader (FGC).
- 6 Aboriginal Practitioners (spread amongst all teams).
- 7 non-Indigenous Practitioners (spread amongst all teams).

With the implementation of the new Signs of Safety Framework across CYF, all staff within the unit have completed introductory training to the new Framework. The unit will cease the use of Winangay Tools to ensure the same framework and standard of care is provided to all families in care. Senior staff within the unit are completing additional leadership and mentoring training on the Framework and will share their knowledge and skills with staff.

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The Appraisal and Support Response Teams continue to host weekly Group Supervision for complex case discussion; and monthly practice days for staff training, upskilling, and de-briefing to support high quality service delivery and staff social and emotional well-being.

Aboriginal staff within the Unit continue to be panellists on the First Nations Cultural Panels including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Emergency Action Panel; the Care Pathway Panel; the Case Discussion and Direction Group; and the informal Yarn Time sessions ensuring:

- First Nations peoples are deliberating and setting the decision direction regarding entries into care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- All legal related work is reviewed and endorsed for ongoing court matters within the Children's Court of the ACT.
- Sound cultural advice is provided to Practitioners CYF wide to ensure their practice is culturally attuned and informed.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) and its 5 inter-related elements are adhered to at all times.

From July to December 2025:

The Appraisal and Support Response Teams provided culturally safe support to families through:

- 35 Support Responses with 35 families, comprising 65 children being diverted safely away from an intrusive Child Protection intervention.
- 45 Appraisals where the threshold for Risk of Significant Harm was met resulting in 43 families comprising of 109 children being offered a safe culturally informed legislated response.

Entries into OoHC during the reporting period:

- 6 children from 4 families entered into OoHC out of the 174 children across 78 families that were allocated during the reporting period.
- 3 of these children were immediately placed with Kin in adherence to the Placement Principle.
- The other 3 children eventually entered into a Kin placement following successful Family Finding.

Exit from OoHC during the reporting period:

- 1 child who was in OoHC on interim-court orders was returned to their birth parent with the orders ceasing safely.

Summary of key achievements in the 6-month period as per the previous reported focus:

- Practitioner positions were advertised and 2 Aboriginal Practitioners were appointed in the Appraisal and Support Response Teams respectively.

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- Operations Manager position was advertised, and an Aboriginal Operations Manager was appointed to lead the Family Connection and Restoration, Family Group Conferencing and Family Finding Teams.
- The implementation of Signs of Safety continues to be implemented in daily practice, with senior Aboriginal staff completing specialist leadership and mentoring training.
- Weekly Group Supervision for complex case discussion and monthly practice days for quality improvement continues.
- Culturally safe services to the community continues.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

For the next 6 months, the focus of the teams that contribute to recommendation 1 will be to:

- Continue the previous 6-months intentions.
- Advertise positions and recruit First Nations applicants.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Engagement of SNAICC for training on embedding Child Placement Principle

That the ACT Community Services Directorate immediately engage SNAICC to train child protection workers on implementing the five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (ATSICPP) within their practice.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The recruitment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training officer was finalised in November 2025. During this period, CYF focused on the development of an updated internal training package to strengthen workforce capability in embedding the ATSICPP in practice for CYF staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The program builds on previous training delivered in collaboration with SNAICC and incorporates local practice examples and learning to better support implementation of the 5 elements of the ATSICPP within the ACT context.

While no formal training sessions were delivered during this reporting period, significant work was undertaken to develop and refine future training materials in preparation for implementation.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The new internal training package focusing on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle (ATSICPP) has reached the end stage of development. This training is tailored for CYF staff working with First Nations children and families and is currently undergoing First Nations peer consultation and review. SNAICC will also be approached to act as a critical friend in reviewing training materials.

Our goal is to effectively integrate ATSICPP principles into our policies and practices using relevant local examples.

Key topics include:

- The importance of culture in ensuring safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Protection of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in welfare contexts.
- Strategies to promote self-determination in child welfare matters.
- Efforts to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the system.

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- Collaborative methodologies and historical context related to child placement.
- Insights from the Family Matters Annual Report.
- Clarification of ATSICPP's priority areas and elements.
- Real-world examples of active efforts across ATSICPP elements.
- Historical impacts of colonisation on First Nations communities.
- Best practices for engaging with Aboriginal families.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Policy and practice review to explicitly embed the Child Placement Principle

That Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS) immediately commence revision of policy and practices to ensure that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Child Placement Principles are explicitly designed into policy and practice. Children must be valued in a process that holds cultural rights as central to their identity and safety.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

During this period, the ATSICPP remained a consistent consideration across all practice guidance updates and creation of new materials to support operational practice.

The Cultural Development Program has been reviewed by the newly recruited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training officer to ensure it continues to align with the ATSICPP, extending further on the training highlighted above.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

CYF will continue to embed the ATSICPP as part of our committed approach to practice guidance development. This includes embedding the ATSICPP in any reviews of existing guidance and ensuring it is considered in all future development.

Further revisions of training materials will be undertaken by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training officer to ensure deep alignment with the ATSICPP across all training delivered by CSPA.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Universal access to Family Group Conferencing

That the Directorate provides (universal) access and availability of Family Group Conferencing as an essential step for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaging or entering the child protection system.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee June 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government August 2018.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The FGC team continued implementation activities aimed at strengthening access to FGC across the CYF service system.

Internal promotion of FGC was reinforced through ongoing engagement with CYF program areas to increase practitioner awareness of FGC as a mechanism for family-led decision making. Practice discussions and internal communications continued to support practitioner understanding of referral pathways and the role of FGC in supporting the ATSICPP.

The revised referral process introduced in the previous reporting period has now been implemented. This includes direct referrals from the Cultural Planning Team following a child or young person's entry into care, supporting earlier engagement with families regarding cultural connection, participation and decision making. The FGC team has also commenced periodic internal communications to prompt practitioners to consider FGC referrals where appropriate.

During this reporting period, CYF has also commenced a practice approach whereby all Cultural Plans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people on orders are referred to for a FGC. This approach recognises the importance of family participation in identifying cultural connections and strengthening family involvement in planning for children and young people. Referring cultural planning processes to FGC supports culturally informed decision making and ensures families are provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to cultural identity, connection and care planning discussions. This work also reflects a broader practice focus within CYF recognising that strengthening family connection is a critical factor in improving restoration pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Practice development activities have continued through monthly learning sessions, supporting the integration of the Signs of Safety Framework into FGC preparation and facilitation. These sessions aim to strengthen culturally responsive and reinforce family-led decision-making within conferencing processes.

Preliminary work has also commenced to progress the evaluation of FGC. Initial scoping has been undertaken to identify key evaluation objectives and outcomes, including the role of FGC in supporting family participation, cultural planning and restoration planning.

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IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Over the next 6 months, CYF will continue to strengthen access to FGC to support family-led decision making for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Priority actions will include progressing recruitment processes to increase First Nations practitioner representation within the FGC team and continuing the implementation of the revised referral process to support earlier engagement with families.

CYF will also continue strengthening the integration of cultural planning processes with FGC to ensure families have meaningful opportunities to participate in discussions relating to cultural identity, connection and care planning discussions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Work will progress on the development of the FGC evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of conferencing in supporting family participation, cultural planning and restoration pathways.

Practice development activities, including monthly learning sessions, will continue to build workforce capability and support culturally responsive, family-centred conferencing practice across the service system.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Ensure full intent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is Reflected in the Children and Young People Act 2008

The child placement principle needs to be explicitly enshrined in legislation. We recommend that the Directorate commence foundation, consultation and research work required to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles (CPP) are appropriately described in the Children and Young People Act. This will require, at a minimum, changes to both Sections 10 and 513 of the Children and Young People Act.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the Act Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The ACT Government has explicitly enshrined the ATSICPP in legislation. It continues to monitor the effectiveness of the legislative reforms that have already been made, including through feedback from the community, to inform future amendments where required.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The ACT Government is committed to continuing the *Children and Young People Act 2008* (CYP Act) and has been reviewing options regarding further embedding the ATSICPP in the CYP Act. Any future changes will be guided by consultation and expert advice.

The ACT Government will participate in national work regarding a national definition of delegated authority, which will inform future work.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Feasibility study Aboriginal Child Care Association

That a comprehensive analysis of an Aboriginal Child Care Association is conducted.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed in 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

A Feasibility Study was conducted and concluded in 2022. This work has then guided the work to establish Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in the children and family services sector and there is ongoing support to transition Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children to ACCO's under the agreed transfer of proportionate funding to Aboriginal led service delivery.

The Aboriginal Service Development branch (ASD) continues to explore all opportunities to work in partnership with the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector and key stakeholders including the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to respond to community needs with the aim of empowering and fostering a strong and sustainable community-controlled sector.

ASD continues to prioritise activities informed by Community in line with the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-28*, including:

- working through the Select Policy Subcommittee of Cabinet – Closing the Gap to develop a Government ACCO Transition and Support Strategy (ACCO Strategy), this is an evolved approach to the ACCO Strategic Framework;
- embed cultural safety in the human services regulation system. The Human Services Regulator and ASD are engaged with the development of the Next Steps Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework. The development of this work will inform what can be embedded in contractual arrangements to enable greater oversight. Discussions at the ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum are continuing to guide and inform this work, which in time, will provide guidance on how best to embed across other sectors;
- progressing exploration of what a peak-like body or other arrangement for the ACT Aboriginal community-controlled sector could look like; and
- continuing to advocate for and inform better practice initiatives aligned with community needs across government i.e. procurement practices.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

ASD will continue to promote working in partnership and supporting the needs of the ACT Aboriginal community controlled sector and progress key activities, with specific next steps including:

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- presenting the proposed approach for the ACCO Strategy to the Select Policy Subcommittee of Cabinet - Closing the Gap in May 2026. Following this consideration, ASD will work in partnership to enact the outcomes.
- engaging a consultant to lead community consultation on the peak like body or other arrangement, ASD will arrange a joint meeting for the consultant, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and ASD to plan the community consultation approach and next steps.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner

The ACT appoint an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner with these and additional capacity to specifically intervene and engage in child protection processes. The Commissioner, on an ongoing basis, would provide monitoring, advice, and advocacy on systemic and individual cases. The Commissioner would be able to advise and influence government on a broad spectrum of issues that impact our children across both government and non-government services including for example, education, health, housing, child protection and provide independent advice on issues of culture and equity. They would also have the specific ability to engage as a party to case conferences and provide alternative pathways to resolution than court orders.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Noted by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed in principle July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

This recommendation has been implemented.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Justice and Community Safety (JACS) is progressing recruitment for the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Commissioner.

RECOMMENDATION 8(A)

Culturally appropriate advocate service

Guidance be published and made immediately accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaged with the child protection system around the nature and role of support people as purposefully and deliberately engaged in meetings.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Over the past 6 months, HCSD has progressed initial work to explore service delivery options for a culturally appropriate advocacy function for carers and families engaging with child, youth and family safety services.

HCSD has been investigating an incubator model, which would utilise the currently available \$200,000 in funding to establish an initial advocacy function with an external organisation as the service provider. The intent of this approach is to test and refine the model in the short term, with a commitment to transition the service to a broader advocacy framework once outcomes from related advocacy initiatives are known, including work underway regarding informal kinship carers, disability advocacy, and other advocacy services across the ACT service system.

In parallel, work has commenced to ensure alignment across related service contracts. Draft contract variations have been prepared to enable similar adjustments to relevant contracts, with the aim of strengthening pathways and connections between advocacy and support services for carers.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Over the next 6 months, HCSD will recommence negotiations to progress the proposed incubator model and confirm service delivery arrangements for the advocacy function. This work will include finalising contractual and funding arrangements, with further refinement of draft contract amendments to support implementation of the model.

Outcomes from the incubator model will be considered alongside broader advocacy reforms, including work underway relating to informal kinship care and disability advocacy services, to inform potential transition to a broader advocacy service model.

RECOMMENDATION 8(B)

Access to legal representation and advocacy

Funding be made available, as a matter of urgency, to professional legal and advocacy services that are culturally appropriate to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are able to access formal legal services.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT (ALS) has continued to deliver the Care and Protection Legal Service (CPLAS) to provide culturally appropriate professional legal assistance including advocacy to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to child protection and the care and protection system. The CPLAS continues to respond to both the legal and non-legal needs of clients.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The ALS will engage with CYF to improve the overall understanding of the services that CPLAS provide.

Following a realignment of functions in the Justice and Community Safety Legislation, Policy and Programs Division, program administration has been moved to the Access to Justice team. The team administers all legal assistance funding on behalf of JACS, including ACT Government and Commonwealth National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2030 funding to ALS NSW/ACT for the delivery of legal assistance services to the ACT community. This provides an opportunity for the CPLAS to be integrated into the broader framework for legal assistance funding administration and policy. JACS will work with the ALS NSW/ACT through this transition period.

RECOMMENDATION 9 & 9(A)

Recommendation 9: Early support programs available

Community feedback has strongly advocated for the need for services that provide positive support to families, early and during voluntary engagement with the child protection system.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2018. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

Recommendation 9(A): Accessible and appropriate early support programs for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, and trauma

The steering committee recommend that the ACT government fund specific programs that are timely and meet the cultural needs of the community in the ACT. These programs must address drug and alcohol rehabilitation, family violence, mental health, trauma counselling and cultural healing.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government in June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – COMMUNITY SERVICES STREAM

3-year-old Development Check Pilot

The 3-year-old development check pilot was delivered in 2 early childhood education and care settings and 2 Koori preschools in Terms 2 and 3, 2025. The 3-year-old check helped identify children with developmental concerns and connect them with appropriate services and supports earlier. An evaluation report has been completed and has informed Phase 2 of the pilot, which will be delivered in 2026.

The Safer Youth Response Service

An independent review of the Safer Youth Response Service (SYRS) pilot program was undertaken by Curijo in late 2025 which found SYRS has addressed a significant service gap, with early evidence of effectiveness in preventing extended police custody and providing relationship-based crisis responses. The review also highlighted the use of trauma informed and culturally responsive practice frameworks, and the delivery of flexible responses tailored to complex client needs, including those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

The SYRS pilot, set up to support the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) reforms, continues to provide an alternative after-hours crisis support, emergency accommodation, and case management for children and young people, mostly aged under 14 years, who come into contact with police and are unable to safely return home.

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The Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People

The Therapeutic Support Panel's second yearly report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 30 October 2025. The Panel, also established to support reforms to raise the MACR, continues to coordinate trauma-informed, culturally safe therapeutic assessments and services for children and young people via therapy plans.

Thriving Kids/Foundational Supports

Between July and December 2025, the Disability Reform Taskforce (DRT) focused on preparatory work for the future design and implementation of Thriving Kids within the OBOW reform context. The focus was on understanding what would be needed to create earlier, more coordinated and culturally safe pathways for children with developmental concerns, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

During this period, the DRT identified gaps across early developmental and foundational supports to inform the next phase of system design. This work included planning for future consultation with ACCOs to ensure the design process is culturally grounded and reflects community-led priorities. These insights are informing the next stages of work and will guide the development of more coordinated and culturally safe early-help supports.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence responses

In October 2025, the ACT Government released its formal response to The Long Yarn report to prevent and address family, domestic and sexual violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Long Yarn is a community-led report authorised by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group (ERG), updating the 2009 We Don't Shoot Our Wounded report. In its response, the ACT Government agreed to all 12 recommendations and reported progress against each one. The 2025–26 ACT Budget included funding for implementing The Long Yarn report. A total of \$6.022 million over 3 years from 2026-27 has been allocated for ACCOs and Aboriginal-led organisations to provide a range of community-led responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiencing family violence.

The Government recognises the need for ongoing, sustained commitment to fully implement The Long Yarn recommendations in partnership with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and to embed their wisdom and expertise in the forthcoming ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy (the Strategy). Throughout 2025, the ACT Government continued consultations to develop the Strategy, with the ERG and ACCOs key stakeholders to ensure the Strategy centres the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – HEALTH STREAM

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm (NBHF)

Operations

From July to December 2025, 2 programs were run at the NBHF where approximately 41 participants took part in formal program activities. Participants' journeys are all different and the impact of the NBHF is hard to quantify at the individual level. Although all NBHF participants are adults, the nature of the holistic support offered by NBHF staff ultimately benefits participants, their children, and their families. As of December 2025, the NBHF has delivered 23 programs.

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Strategic Project

This is in the first stage of multiple stages, with the grant process supporting the transition of the NBHF to Community-control well underway. The Stage 1: Partnership and Readiness Grant (the Grant) opened November 2025 and closed February 2026. The original closing date was extended following a request from Community.

Watson Health Precinct – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Facility

At the Watson Health Precinct, construction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Facility continued during the period, and the subdivision of the site was successfully achieved.

Kindergarten Health Check

Kindergarten Health Check (KHC) physical health checks and data collection were completed in December 2025.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnerships team continues to provide input regarding evaluation projects and through the KHC Governance Committee.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model

Following a select tender procurement process in November 2025 an evaluation panel comprising majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made a recommendation to the delegate for the suitable specialist consultancy to work with community and ACCO's to co-design a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model.

The evaluation panel recommendation was accepted by the delegate and in January 2026 a contract with Yamagigu Consulting was executed.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention, Postvention and Aftercare Service

Thirrili continued to deliver culturally grounded suicide prevention, intervention, postvention and aftercare services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT. Service delivery during the reporting period reflected continuity of care for existing clients and targeted responses to new in-scope clients.

Many of its clients require intensive advocacy and coordination to navigate complex service systems. Thirrili's advocacy on behalf of its clients spans from housing to alcohol and other drug supports. For example, during the period, Thirrili worked collaboratively with the NBHF to refer clients to the Farm as part of their healing journey, and to support those clients before, during and after their participation.

Thirrili saw a sharp increase in requests for support from organisations and services, as well as from bereaved families. In response, Thirrili continued to strengthen partnerships with locally based ACCOs and sector stakeholders to improve referral pathways, service coordination, and culturally safe shared responses.

One key outcome was an agreed partnership with the Medicare Mental Health Centre (Tuggeranong) for a Thirrili advocate to co-locate at Tuggeranong Medicare 1 day per week to provide cultural advocacy and support, and Medicare clinicians to provide support at the Thirrili office. This co-location model will commence in early 2026.

Discussions are also underway to expand the model to the Civic Centre, improving geographic accessibility for the community.

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Implementation Update July-December 2025

The outstanding actions from the last reporting period were completed, as follows:

- Staffing
 - Thirrili now operates with its intended full suite of staff.
 - Thirrili's Canberra office phone line is now active and was promoted.

Challenges, opportunities, and anticipated outcomes:

- There were no Torres Strait Islander clients during the reporting period. Thirrili has made strengthening Torres Strait Islander engagement a priority for 2026.
- Attendance at the Monthly gatherings was a challenge and only 2 took place in this period. An internal review was completed, resulting in a redesigned and themed Gathering model to be implemented in 2026 to strengthen participation.

ACT EDUCATION DIRECTORATE

The ACT Government continues its focus on increasing equity and access to early childhood education for 3 and 4-year-old children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Education Directorate (EDU) continues to implement initiatives under Phase Two of Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT (Set up for Success) and Valuing Educators, Values Children: A Workforce Strategy for the ACT's early childhood education and care profession (2022-2025) contributing to recommendation 9, including through:

- Three-year-old preschool: In 2025, over 3000 children accessed the program, approximately 75 children (2.5%) were identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- Targeted 3-year-old initiative: In 2025, 398 children accessed the 3-year-old initiative, 46 children (11.6%) were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Nine places in the initiative are also available at Wreck Bay's Gudjahgahmiamia Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services Early Learning Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Koori Preschool: In the 2025 Census of ACT Schools, 117 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in a Koori Preschool Program.
- ACT-wide approach to effective transitions: Transitions support for children exiting the targeted 3-year-old initiative is provided by EDU's Early Childhood Community Coordinators (ECCCs). During the reporting period, 15 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children were supported by the ECCCs to transition to a 4-year-old public preschool. All children exiting 3-year-old preschool attending an ACT public preschool are also required to have a transition document provided to families to share with their receiving school.
- Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program: The scholarships program continues to be delivered in partnership with Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation. In 2025, 8 applications were received and 5 scholarships were awarded to Aboriginal individuals seeking to enter the profession.

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- **Strong Beginnings – Aboriginal Educator Network:** Launched on 13 November 2025 as part of the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarships Program, the Network gathers quarterly and offers a place where Aboriginal educators can learn from one another, access meaningful professional development, and help shape a stronger, more culturally informed Early Childhood Education Centre (ECEC) sector in the ACT. Educators are not required to be engaged in the scholarship program to participate. 12 educators attended the inaugural gathering.
- **Early Learning Connection (ELC) Program:** Delivered in partnership with Baringa Child Care Association, ELC provides scholarships for individuals to complete a Certificate III, Diploma or Degree qualification in early childhood, including coaching and wrap-around supports for participants. In February 2025, a co-designed First Nations Stream (Boori Educator Connection) was launched to enable culturally appropriate support and flexible study options for Aboriginal women to pursue a career in ECEC. Since the stream commenced, 12 individuals have participated, with 5 participants securing employment at Koori Preschools or ECECs through the program.
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Early Childhood Educational Practice professional learning program:** During the reporting period, 91 individuals enrolled in the program. Feedback on the program has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting the program's rich co-designed content, practical strategies for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and its impact on their confidence and cultural competence.

EDU continues to contribute to National reform initiatives contributing to recommendation 9, including through:

- **Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP):** EDU continues to be a co-representative for the ACT on ECCDPP alongside HCSD. During the reporting period, 2 meetings were held (18-19 September and 12-13 November). Key actions over the reporting period include:
 - Further work to progress implementation advice regarding increasing the portion of funding for child and family services to ACCOs, and funding models for ACCOs delivering child and family services.
 - A focus on Closing the Gap Targets 11 and 12, including cross-partnership work with the Safe and Supported Partnership.
 - Progressing work, in collaboration with the Early Childhood Policy Group (ECPG), to refresh Closing the Gap Target 3 (access to high quality and culturally appropriate early childhood education).
- **Preschool Outcomes Measure (POM):** Under the Preschool Reform Agreement 2022-2027, the Australian Government and all states and territories have committed to develop a POM tool, to support formative assessment in the year before full-time school.
 - Extensive consultation with First Nations stakeholders has been undertaken to make sure the POM reflects First Nations children's culture and identity and can be adapted to local community needs. Ninti One has collaborated closely with the tool's developer, the Australian Council for Educational Research, to embed First Nations perspectives throughout the design process.

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- During the Reporting Period, the POM National Applied Trial was conducted in the ACT, involving 82 preschool settings, including 2 Koori Preschools. EDU worked closely with ACER and Ninti One to enable engagement with First Nations teachers and educators during the trial.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – COMMUNITY SERVICES STREAM

The ACT Government will continue to deliver and build early support services, including services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through:

- Supporting Yerrabi Yurwang to increase enrolments in the Aunty Agnes Shea Early Childhood Scholarship Program, with a specific focus on educators already working in Koori Preschools and the ECEC sector.
- Continuing to promote the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culturally Inclusive and Responsive Early Childhood Educational Practices professional learning to early childhood educators, to build competence and capability across the sector.
- Promotion of the Koori Preschool program to the community to encourage enrolment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-5 years old.
- Supporting HCSD to deliver a second 3-year-old Development Check pilot at services, including 2 Koori Preschools.

3-year-old Check Pilot

Planning is underway to deliver Phase 2 of the 3-year-old check in 2026. Site selection and stakeholder meetings have commenced, including engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. Building on insights from the first pilot, Phase 2 will focus on 3-year-old children in ECEC settings, Koori preschools and other outreach locations. To strengthen equity and access, 4-year-old children attending Koori preschools will also be included.

Phase 2 will include face-to-face Maternal, Child and Family Health (MACH) appointments in children's familiar Koori preschool or ECEC environment. Children with developmental concerns will be identified early and linked with appropriate services and supports. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the pilot will use a culturally appropriate developmental screening tool, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ-TRAK).

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence responses

Work will continue to deliver the 2025-26 ACT Budget investment of \$6.022 million for implementing recommendations of The Long Yarn report. New contracts will be signed with ACCOs that received funding over 3 years for family, domestic and sexual violence services from 2026-27. In addition, early consultation is expected to commence with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative bodies to support planning for a community and professional education program communicating that the 'violence is not our way'. The 2025-26 Budget committed \$600,000 over 2 years from 2026-27 for the program which will be designed and led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

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In the first half of 2026, an independent, Aboriginal-led evaluation will commence into the NaraGanaWali Strengthening Families program which is delivered by Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation. The evaluation will use a strengths-based, transparent and solution-focused approach to identify opportunities for the ACT Government to further strengthen and support the growth of successful programs.

The ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy (the Strategy) and First Action Plan are expected to be released in mid-2026. Essential to the Strategy is the ACT Government's commitment to work in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to prevent and respond to violence.

Consultations will be held in the first half of 2026 to develop the Action Plan underpinning the Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (Our Ways) launching in February 2026. The ACT is a signatory to Our Ways which is Australia's first standalone plan to address the high and disproportionate rates of violence against Aboriginal women and children.

The ACT Government continued supporting the adaptation and delivery of the evidence-based Caring Dads program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers, delivered by Yeddung Mura (Good Pathways) Aboriginal Corporation. This included providing additional funding of \$182,000, increasing the total project funding to \$1,142,625 over 3 years. This funding increase will ensure continued resourcing for program participants and their families, through increased capability to provide targeted support to mothers and carers connected to the program. During this period, Yeddung Mura continued delivery of the adapted program, with the support of Kids First Australia.

HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORATE – HEALTH STREAM

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm (NBHF)

Operations

It is anticipated, from January to June 2026, the NBHF will continue to deliver programs. While it is currently operated by the ACT Government, work is progressing to support the transition of the NBHF to a community-controlled organisation, and support later self-determined transition to a residential service.

Strategic Project

It is anticipated a partner ACCO will be identified through the grant process.

Watson Health Precinct – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Facility

Construction of the new facility is expected to be completed, alongside the establishment of a new service deed and the provision of 2025–26 funding to Winnunga Nimmityjah. This funding will support the development of the residential rehabilitation service, including preparations to open and operate the service. In addition, a lease for the site will be provided to Winnunga Nimmityjah.

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Kindergarten Health Check

The 2026 program will commence in February with questionnaires distributed through schools. Child physical health checks are scheduled for May-Sept.

A KHC report has been reconfigured to encompass 2019-2022, with annual reports to start from 2023 data. Consultation with the aforementioned Partnerships team will be key for the accurate and culturally nuanced reporting of data specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Mental Health Service Model

Yamagigu will develop a fully costed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth mental health service model for young people aged 12 to 25 years, tailored to the ACT context and targeting those with moderate support needs. The final report is expected to be completed by November 2026.

Clybucca Dreaming Intensive First Nations Perinatal Case Management Support

An Outcomes Report to evaluate the Clybucca Dreaming Try-Test-Learn initiative is expected to be completed in March 2026. Early qualitative data suggests strong positive improvements in cultural connection and wellbeing for First Nations women with participants reporting strengthened cultural ties, increased access to Elders and mental health benefits alongside notable positive behaviour changes across smoking, substance use, diet and engagement with coordinated health and therapeutic supports.

Clybucca Dreaming will continue to provide intensive First Nation's Perinatal Case Management Support to First Nation's women and is currently funded to June 30, 2026.

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention, Postvention and Aftercare Service

Over the next 6-month period, Thirrili is expected to continue to provide advocacy and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have access to culturally safe services across suicide prevention, postvention, and aftercare.

It is anticipated that Thirrili's engagement strategies with the local sector will continue to develop and mature in response to increased interest in culturally safe care.

RECOMMENDATION 10(A) & 10(B) I & II

10(A) Access to supports for kinship carers

The Steering Committee recommends that the Directorate be more direct and transparent with supports that are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers. We recommend that the Directorate design and communicate a simple, accessible, and equitable process by which kinship carers can access or apply for supports with a mechanism to dispute the findings and have circumstances re-evaluated. This process must be designed with the community to ensure that the processes do not unnecessarily compound the difficulties and trauma experienced by kinship carers.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

10(B) Kinship care assessment process

10(b)(i) The Steering Committee recommends that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children be placed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship care immediately upon removal rather than being moved to foster care while carer checks are conducted when stable family options for care are present.

10(b)(ii) The Steering Committee recommends that the process of applying and performing suitability assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship carers (Kinship Carer Assessments) is a transparent and timely process and that additional resources be applied to ensure that these are not delayed.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government in May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

There are now 2 permanently identified First Nations Carer Support practitioner positions within the CYF Kinship Team, with funding for a second position secured in 2025. Recruitment occurred for the additional position between July and Dec 2025.

The First Nations Carer Support continues to provide proactive support to kinship carers including through the development of Carer Support Plans. The support plan template has been updated to align with the Signs of Safety Framework and work continues to imbed this into practice.

The first Carer Connect Training occurred in Term 1 of 2025. The group was facilitated by 2 staff from the CYF Kinship Team and was held weekly for 9 weeks. A second group was scheduled to progress in Term 4 of 2025, however was rescheduled due to low enrolments.

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The Kinship and Foster Carers Research Hub was developed in partnership with CYF and launched in mid-2025. It is an online platform that is accessible to all kinship and foster carers and contains a range of support, training and information materials. All resources are free, open access, and written in plain

language. No log ins are required and additional content can be added regularly based on carer feedback, wants and needs.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Upcoming training and carer events for 2026 include:

- April - CYF Kinship Carer Families Easter Celebration in early April.
- Term 2- Carer Connect Training will commence and will be held weekly for 9 weeks.
- May - there will be training for carers about supporting children with family time visits
- June - there will be a morning tea with guests from Centrelink to speak with carers about the child care subsidy.

These trainings are available to all CYF carers, and now with the First Nations Carer Support roles filled, uplift and adjustments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kinship Carers will be explored.

First Aid Training for all CYF kinship carers remains available with an agreement carers can enrol in their chosen course with St John's Ambulance at a time and date that is convenient and CYF will fund the cost.

First Nations carer support staff will attend carer training and mornings teas and they will explore drop in options out in community. All new kinship carers, with children in placement, will receive a carer support plan which will be put in place to support their needs.

RECOMMENDATION 11(A) & (B)

Improve quality and monitoring of cultural plans

11(A) The Steering Committee recommends that the Directorate adopt a highly consultative approach to the development of cultural plans in line with the participation, partnership, and connection elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This will drive an improvement in the quality and relevance of cultural plans to children's cultural needs.

11(B) The Steering Committee recommends the Directorate seek support and guidance on leading practice in the development, monitoring, and quality of cultural plans from local community-controlled organisations and from other jurisdictions who lead in this, for example the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The Cultural Plans monitoring and quality review framework, established in 2023, continued to function effectively throughout the reporting period. Between 1 July and 31 December 2025, CYF and external providers completed 85 Cultural Plans. As at 31 December 2025, 167 of the 187 Aboriginal children eligible for a Cultural Plan had a current plan in place, representing 89.30 percent.

During this period, the transition to the new service delivery model progressed smoothly. External providers including Barnardos, OzChild, Key Assets, and the Australian Childhood Foundation were fully embedded in their roles and consistently adhered to established processes and procedures. This resulted in the timely development of high quality, meaningful Cultural Plans.

To further support CYF practitioners in producing culturally informed and timely Cultural Plans, and to strengthen consultation, participation, partnership, and cultural connection, an agreement was implemented in September 2025 with the FGC team. Under this arrangement, every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child eligible for a Cultural Plan is now referred to FGC. This initiative aims to enrich the development of each child's Cultural Plan through deeper engagement with families, community members, and cultural stakeholders. The initiative remains in its pilot phase, with ongoing collaboration between CYF and the FGC team to refine and embed a meaningful, culturally responsive approach.

In addition, The ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum was established in 2025 and brings together out of home care service providers to meet regularly and work collaboratively to implement culturally safe and responsive reform initiatives. As part of their work schedule the AACF reviewed tools used by different providers to support culturally safe case work practice and engagement.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

CYF will continue to monitor the quality and compliance of Cultural Plans across teams and maintain support for external providers in strengthening their understanding of the purpose, cultural significance, and impact of high quality Cultural Plans.

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In addition, CYF will focus on further strengthening the partnership with the FGC team, including refining referral pathways, enhancing collaborative practice, and embedding consistent processes to ensure FGC is effectively supporting the development of Cultural Plans. This work will help consolidate the pilot initiative and move toward a more sustainable and culturally grounded model for future practice.

In 2026, led by Yerrabi, members are working to jointly develop a shared Cultural Accountability tool with in-principle agreement to develop a common set of questions that will mean consistent standards and measurement of culturally safe and sensitive service delivery. This will support better cultural planning, monitoring and review for Aboriginal children and young people in out of home care.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Pathways to restoration

The Steering Committee recommends that prompts and triggers to considering restoration are mapped and implemented, especially when there has been a positive change in parenting capacity. Restoration needs to use a strengths-based, motivational approach and should consider restoration to family, not just to parents.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government in May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Between 1 July and 31 December 2025, within the Child Safety branch of CYF there were 10 Aboriginal children who were either restored to their parents care or care orders were lapsed. For 3 of these families there was an application for orders to 18 which was reviewed by the case management team with shorter term orders then being sought.

Implementing the internal Aboriginal Case Discussion and Direction group along with Care Pathways have been essential to working in a more culturally safe and informed manner which has in turn led to these positive outcomes.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

During this reporting period, the emerging Child Placement Principle Review process was formalised within draft policy and procedure documents.

The Placement Review is conducted to assess the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. Specifically, the review measures the practice conducted by the primary case management team with respect to ensuring each child is supported in adherence to the 5 inter-related elements of the child placement principles.

Upon completion and evaluation of the Placement Review, an outcome summary will be provided with key recommendations for the primary case management team to address if necessary. The key recommendations will aim to improve the cultural care for children in out of home care and serve to protect future generations from devastating effects of removal from family, community, culture and country.

It is planned the Placement Principle Review will be shared with the OBOW committee during this reporting period.

Furthermore, an internal review has occurred regarding all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who have self-placed away from their authorised out of home care placement.

There are approximately 20 young people who are currently on 18-year orders who are living with their birth parents or Kin; and the self-placing project will involve safely engaging these families to discuss:

- What supports can be provided to the family from a Family Preservation standpoint, rather than long-term out of home care work.

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- Discussing the possibility of revocation of orders and subsequent restoration of this cohort of children to their birth parents.

Thus far, the Family Connection and Restoration Team have engaged in conversations with key partner agencies, such as Yerrabi Yurwang, OzChild and Barnados ACT to discuss the self-placing project, and to determine what their support services can provide the families under the sustaining families umbrella in a safely, catered approach tailored to each specific family's needs.

A workshop to discuss and finalise the model is currently being planned to occur early 2026, and work will continue in this space and additional updates will be provided during the January – July 2026 reporting period, as well as to the specific Restoration OBOW subgroups.

Concurrently with this, business as usual for the team continued, with the following occurring in the Desktop Review (Deep Dive) space:

- 7 desktop reviews (deep dives) commenced during the reporting period.
- 3 did not progress to Restoration Viability Reviews.
- 2 progressed to Restoration Viability Reviews.
- 2 are still underway with the outcome pending.

Within the Restoration Viability Review space, the following occurred:

- 2 Restoration Viability Reviews completed with the recommendations for Restoration and have resulted in 3 children safely returning home to their respective parents.
- 2 Restoration Viability Reviews completed, however did not proceed further as the birth parents employed self-determination and opted out of the process.
- 2 Restoration Viability Review outcomes pending; with 1 of these families looking highly likely for Restoration of 3 children to occur to their birth parents.
- For the children and family part of the successful Restoration; case management has ceased with the out of home care agency with primary case management returned to CYF, with the plan that internal transfer occurs to the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team, Support Response Team for family preservation support.

Signs of success:

Significant progress has been made by the Family Connection and Restoration Team in their ongoing support and advocacy to community, with the following restorations occurring:

- Family 1 – child restored home to the birth parents from long-term kinship placement.
- Family 2 – 2 children restored home from long-term foster care placement.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander father inclusive practice

The Steering Committee recommendation that CSD engage with Aboriginal community leadership to develop an improved policy position, practice guides and training that include fathers through the child protection process and makes concrete efforts to engage and maintain engagement with fathers who are incarcerated.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government May 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

During the period from July to December 2025, CYF continued to deliver targeted training to strengthen culturally responsive and father inclusive practice among practitioners.

One face-to-face Culturally Responsive Practice training session was delivered in September 2025, with 9 staff members participating. This training supports practitioners to work respectfully and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and emphasises the importance of engaging the broader family network in line with the Child and Young People Act.

In addition, Father Inclusive Practice (FIP) training was delivered in September 2025, with 6 staff members attending. This training builds practitioner capability to actively engage fathers and paternal family members in assessment, decision-making and planning processes for children and young people.

These training sessions form part of CYF's ongoing efforts to strengthen culturally responsive, family-inclusive practice and to support greater recognition of the role of fathers, grandfathers and extended family members in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Developing a condensed and online version of the Culturally Responsive Practice training to increase accessibility and support broader uptake across the CYF workforce as capability and resourcing allow.

Continuing engagement with the Winnunga Justice Reinvestment Program to progress earlier good-faith discussions regarding co-facilitation of Father Inclusive Practice training. Partnering with ACCOs will strengthen the cultural authority and practical relevance of the training and provide practitioners with deeper insight into effective engagement with Aboriginal fathers and extended family members.

These activities will support the continued strengthening of culturally responsive, family-inclusive practice across CYF and reinforce the importance of engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers and kin in child protection decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 14

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments

The Steering Committee recommends that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the appropriate Health Assessment annually to ensure they receive the appropriate preventative and primary health services in the ACT. This should be included as an essential process within the Annual Review process.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee May 2019. Noted by the ACT Government May 2019 and agreed July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The role of the Health Liaison Officer (HLO) and importance of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) 715-health check is now embedded in the Foundational Learning Program with a dedicated session. The process for children on Care and Protection Orders has now been finalised and will be launched within CYF during the next reporting period. This has included:

- Briefing sessions for staff
- Completion of procedure documents
- Updated information on the CYF Knowledge Portal
- Refining data collection and monitoring systems

The new process will include providing refreshed information to the carer about the MBS 715, offering support to book the health check, confirming when the health check has occurred, recording completed health checks on the CYF database, and using the database to create reminders for MBS 715s.

To support children who are currently in care to access the MBS 715 who had not already done so, the HLO began working with carers in January 2026 to support attendance of this health check.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Next Steps:

- A Clinical Consults Corner Session is being developed for mid-2026 to provide extra support for Practitioners.
- Ongoing collaboration will occur between the HLO and CYF Kinship Team to promote education around MBS 715 Health Assessments and the support available to carers.
- Active 1:1 support to carers to access MBS 715 assessments will be ongoing.
- Consultation across directorates to promote the uptake of MBS 715 Assessments more broadly.

RECOMMENDATION 15

Governance and oversight of implementation of recommendations

The Steering Committee recommends that an Implementation Oversight Committee of five members be established to meet at least on a quarterly basis to receive updates from the Directorate and other relevant parties to address progress and ascertain whether the implementation has stayed true to the original intent of the recommendations.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee September 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government December 2019.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Since June 2025, HCSD has worked closely with the Chair and members of the OBOWIOC under a revised implementation process.

This process includes a meeting structure of quarterly OBOWIOC and HCSD meetings, complemented by 6 weekly OBOWIOC only check-ins and monthly subgroup meetings.

The subgroup meetings involve 2 OBOWIOC members alongside 2 HCSD Executive leads discussing high focus recommendations. A total of 6 recommendations are currently being progressed through this meeting structure.

The subgroups represent a more informal and collaborative approach to working in partnership, with feedback from OBOWIOC members and HCSD executive indicating that this new approach is working well.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The monthly subgroups will continue to discuss and progress the recommendations identified as High Focus, with updates provided to the broader OBOWIOC at the quarterly OBOWIOC and HCSD meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 16

Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led decision making in child protection

The Steering Committee recommend that every opportunity be taken to engage the child and family in decision making, particularly using conferencing mechanisms to promote shared understanding and facilitate participation of families in decision making for their children.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Family Led Decision making is featured throughout the training listed below and includes the number of sessions run during this reporting period.

July 2025

- A practical guide to Emergency Action
- Cultural Development Program
- Internal Review of Decision Making

August 2025

- Cultural Development Program
- Signs of Safety
- Engaging Children, Adolescents and Parents

September 2025

- Cultural Development Program
- Reflective Practice
- Culturally Responsive Practice
- Father Inclusive Practice
- A Practical Guide to Emergency Action

October 2025

- Safe and Together

November 2025

- Safe and Together

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Supporting staff through the Learning Lead Network

The Learning Lead Network continued its development program. Learning Leads are building deeper understanding of the Signs of Safety approach, particularly around family network building and safety planning, so they can better support staff as family-led approaches are strengthened.

Strengthening reflective supervision

Reflective supervision continues to be strengthened through the new Supervision and Group Supervision Framework launched in November 2025. This has increased awareness of safety networks, naturally connected supports and how these elements guide strong decision making in family-led practice. Early feedback from staff is informing refinement of templates and guidance. Practice leaders have also been providing group supervision sessions to help build confidence in applying the approach.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Signs of Safety brochure suite

Six brochures are being developed to support face-to-face conversations with children, young people, families and carers. These brochures explain what Signs of Safety is and how it works in practice. The suite includes brochures for:

- parents and families
- partners and stakeholders
- safety networks
- young people involved in youth justice
- children involved in child protection
- young people involved in child protection
- Easy English and plain English versions will also be produced to support accessibility and participation.

Consultant visit – May 2026

The Signs of Safety consultant and training team will visit Canberra from the United Kingdom in May 2026 for a two-week program. During this visit, they will deliver another advanced five-day training program focused on frontline practitioners and leaders. They will also run workshops and consultation sessions to strengthen practice capability and support ongoing implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 17

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce and Leadership

The Steering Committee recommend that CSD focus on attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to join CYPS and invest specifically in the recruitment and development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members into leadership and executive positions.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

During the reporting period, CYF continued progressing development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathway, including refining the proposed model and considering workforce structures and placement opportunities to support implementation. Engagement with education partners has also continued to inform the design of the pathway and future recruitment opportunities.

In November 2025, a decision was made to continue progressing development of the pathway while consultation with the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) continues, recognising the importance of establishing stronger entry pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into CYF roles.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Over the next 6 months, CYF will focus on finalising the operational design of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathway, including confirming the positions to be allocated to the program.

Once these positions are confirmed, further engagement will occur with the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Yurauna Centre and the ACT Education Directorate to support targeted promotion of the pathway and ensure that recruitment opportunities are genuine, viable and ready to be filled.

The partnership with Charles Sturt University (CSU) remains strong, with social work student placements anticipated to commence in the second half of 2026. CYF will work with CSU to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who may be interested in undertaking placements with CYF, supporting longer-term workforce development and recruitment pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 18

Support development of the cultural services team

The Steering Committee recommend that the Cultural Services Team be supported to develop through:

- *Defining specific policies and processes that guide their practice, engagement, responsibility and influence with families and case workers, particularly around decisions and pathways for children;*
- *Assess work level standards and equivalency with case workers (post new EBA levels and standards);*
- *Recognising and valuing specific, in demand skills;*
- *Defining policy and processes for escalation of concerns and for them to be considered in a timely and appropriate manner;*
- *Reviewing employment contracts with a view to ensuring permanency to build a stable team;*
- *Developing mechanisms that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members to be supported in their personal development plans with clear pathways to further professional development, and*
- *Establishing pathways for development and promotion to senior levels within the organisation.*

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Following internal conversations with senior First Nations staff, and external consultation and discussion with the OBOWIOC it was determined the previous positions and supports provided attached to the Cultural Services Team will be dispersed amongst the CYF floor.

This has allowed the following to occur:

- The creation of the Family Response and Engagement Unit.
- The permanent appointment of the Senior Director, First Nations.
- The vital services of Family Finding and Cultural Planning oversight to continue for First Nations families.
- The redirection of cultural advice and consultation to occur via the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Care Pathway Panel, Case Discussion and Direction Group, and Yarn Time sittings.

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Of importance to note, the cultural expertise of the team has not ceased, rather it is being provided by a variety of positions in different areas across the CYF floor. This enables ongoing exposure of non-Indigenous staff to the insights and advice of First Nations people in advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The focus of the teams that contribute to recommendation 18 will be to:

- Continue business as usual for the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Unit.
- Advertise positions and recruit First Nations applicants.

RECOMMENDATION 19

Appropriate identification, and de-identification, of children

The Steering Committee recommend that the Directorate develop specific guidelines and processes to define their role in relation to the identification and de-identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that makes explicit the limit of the Directorate's role and the need for independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community oversight and assurance of the process.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Throughout July to December 2025, CYF maintained its close monitoring of cultural status records for all children and young people engaged with the service. The established mechanism for reconciling the details of children and young people in HCSD and the Director General's care continued to operate effectively during this period.

Instances where a child or young person's Aboriginality remained inconclusive continued to be actioned promptly. CYF practitioners were supported by the designated First Nations Family Findings staff member and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Case Discussion and Direction Group to progress enquiries and confirm cultural identity wherever possible.

All children and young people recorded with an "unknown/not stated" Indigenous status continued to be actively monitored. Weekly follow up with CYF practitioners ensured ongoing attention to these cases, supporting timely clarification and accurate recording of cultural status.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

CYF will continue to closely monitor cultural status records for all children and young people and will prioritise timely action on any cases where Aboriginality remains inconclusive or where a cultural status is recorded as "unknown/not stated". Strengthening accuracy and consistency in cultural identification will remain a key focus, with ongoing support provided to practitioners to ensure cultural status information is verified, updated promptly, and recorded correctly across all systems.

RECOMMENDATION 20

Segmentation and data on kinship care

The Steering Committee recommend that the CYPS adopt the Family Matters definition of kinship when applying the ATSICPP and as a discreet reporting group whenever providing data on kinship care.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government June 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

HCSD provides similar data to several national publications, including:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This report presents data on First Nations children in the child protection system. The most recent report was published on 30 September 2025 and includes 2023-24 financial year data. The next version (containing 2024-25 data) will likely be published at the end of September 2026. This data also includes tracking against the ATSICPP. Refer to tables 10.4, 10.7 and 10.10.
- The SNAICC Family Matters Report 2025 – an annual publication that tracks progress towards ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe, cared for and connected to their families, communities and culture. Refer to “Placement types” section (from pg 60), including Figure 28 (pg 62).
- The Report on Government Services 2026, Part F Community Services, Section 16 Child protection services, released on 29 January 2026, includes data for the 2024-25 financial year. This section reports on the performance of governments in providing child protection services across Australia. Refer to Tables 16A.24 and 16A.25.

HCSD also provides the following data which is also publicly available:

- The Next Steps Snapshot Report presents data on children and young people in out-of-home care in the ACT. The most recent report presents data up to the 2024-25 financial year (up to 30 June 2025). Refer to Measure 4 (pg 12).

The Next Steps report and the OBOW data provided in the front section of this report include the number of children in out of home care and those on Third Party Parental Responsibility orders, which is different to the standard definition of out of home care in the national publications.

This provides HCSD the opportunity to report on the numbers of children and young people in kinship care in a way that aligns more closely with the Family Matters definition of kinship care, for those children and young people who are unable to live at home.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

HCSD continues to improve and expand on the use of this data in reports, including as part of a working group supporting the interconnection of the above National data reports to improve comparability and cohesiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 21

ACT Indigenous procurement policy

The Steering Committee recommend that future procurement for child protection services must be aligned to the ACT Government Indigenous Procurement Policy as it relates to the funding of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and must evidence alignment and fulfilment of the ATSICPP in their placement of children, recruitment of carers, assessment of kinship carers and case work.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2020. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2021.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Communication and education activities have commenced to support increased awareness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy across government and the community (including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises). These activities will encourage higher and more meaningful utilisation of the Policy.

In October 2025, as part of Indigenous Business Month, the ACT Government participated in supplier engagement sessions through the ACT Government's BADJI Business Support Program. These sessions focused on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier procurement capability.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The ACT Government is continuing to progress work to update the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy and associated resources, with the updated policy anticipated to take effect on 1 July 2026. HCSD is currently reforming its Procurement and Grants approach and will look to embed the updated policy within HCSD practice.

RECOMMENDATION 22(A), (B) & (C)

Quality of case work and allocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under A Step Up For Our Kids

22 (A) The Steering Committee recommend that there be a framework developed and implemented for the formal monitoring and supervision of the quality of case work being conducted by ACT Together in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on long term orders.

22 (B) The Steering Committee recommend that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that move to long term orders, from January 2020, must be managed by Child and Youth Protection Services and not transferred to ACT Together until a framework is in place to monitor the quality of casework

22 (C) the Steering Committee recommend that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are fostered by ACT Together staff, must be managed by the Directorate and that this transition be completed by June 30, 2020.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

In the period July to December 2025, the work of the ACT Aboriginal Childrens Forum included a review of tools used by the different organisations to monitor and ensure the cultural needs of children and young people in out of home care are met with a consistent approach. Work also included a review of the cultural clauses included in provider contracts with recommendations for some amendments to ensure these remain contemporary.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The cultural clauses in contracts with providers will be updated.

The ACT Aboriginal Childrens Forum will continue to review tools used to support culturally safe practice. Lead by Yerrabi, members are jointly developing a shared Cultural Accountability tool with in-principle agreement to develop a common set of questions that will mean consistent standards and measurement of culturally safe and sensitive service delivery.

RECOMMENDATION 23

Wreck Bay

The Steering Committee recommends that CSD undertake a proper consultation process with the Wreck Bay community about an appropriate service and support model including family and early support, and child protection issues that promotes better outcomes for the community. The timeframes associated with this consultation should be determined by the Wreck Bay community.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Health and Community Services Directorate

On April 2024, a business case requesting additional funding within the current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the provision of early intervention services in Wreck Bay was successful with approved funding.

The intent for this service is to be delivered by an ACCO to address the equity issues in accessing early supports.

The Grant was formalised in November 2025, the funding included in this Grant is for South Coast Aboriginal Medical Corporation to undertake family preservation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living in the Wreck Bay Community.

South Coast Aboriginal Medical Corporation have identified that they work with families in the region by utilising Family Action Plans, which focus on family strength, connection to culture, family and community, developing goal statements and action items to address the identified concerns.

CYF and other community services will be able to refer Wreck Bay families to South Coast Aboriginal Medical Service to address child protection concerns.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD)

The ACT continues to provide a range of services in the Jervis Bay Territory on behalf of the Commonwealth including family and early support services in accordance with established service delivery arrangements.

The ACT Government has maintained its efforts to progress discussions with the Commonwealth around a new MoU to support service delivery in the Jervis Bay Territory.

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Health and Community Services Directorate

In the next 6 months, there will be a focus on outreach and working with the community and government services to increase their referrals to this new service.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD)

Progression on a new MoU remains dependent on agreement of both governments. A renewed MoU will provide an opportunity to renew the existing service delivery arrangements in the Jervis Bay Territory to ensure family and early support services are appropriate for the Wreck Bay Community.

RECOMMENDATION 24

Appoint a project team to implement recommendations and monitor practice change

The Steering Committee recommends that the ACT Community Services Directorate form a dedicated implementation team with skills in project management, community engagement, and outcomes measurement to plan, engage community and implement recommendations in both Child and Youth Protection Services and ACT Together.

Staffing of such a team must include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This implementation team would provide quarterly reports to the Implementation Oversight Committee.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The OBOW Implementation team continues to support HCSD to progress and report on the implementation of the OBOW recommendations through:

- The development of papers and documents for the OBOWIOC Chair and members to support discussion regarding the implementation of recommendations;
- Assisting the SNAICC secretariat team to plan and facilitate the monthly subgroup meetings and quarterly OBOWIOC and HCSD meetings;
- Processing invoices relating to the work of the OBOWIOC Chair and committee members; and
- Responding to ad-hoc requests and briefs relating to the work of the OBOWIOC and progress of the OBOW recommendations.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

The OBOW Implementation team will continue to support HCSD executive and the OBOWIOC to meet as necessary to progress the implementation of each of the OBOW recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 25

Data collection and analysis

The Steering Committee recommends the Directorate establish formal key performance indicators in collaboration with the Implementation Oversight Committee and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, for measuring the reduction of children entering the system, improvements in their experience in the system, and the provision of pathways to restoration and exiting care. These key performance indicators can then be formally and independently evaluated from this baseline in five years.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

Reports continue to have been produced and shared regularly with the OBOWIOC between July and December 2025, with delays in some months.

The directorate has been working to develop a dashboard on key data points that demonstrate how the system is improving, what is working and identifying pressure points. An overview of the dashboard was presented to the OBOW IOC in December 2025 and was endorsed by the committee.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

HCSD is working with the committee to finalise and publicly launch the dashboard in first half of 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 26(A) & 26(B)

26(A) Adoption and permanency arrangements

The Steering Committee recommends that following the community consultations that have occurred, the Directorate move to formalise the policy position in legislation and remove the possibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being adopted.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed in principle by the ACT Government July 2020.

26 (B) Enduring Parental Responsibility orders

The Steering Committee recommend that EPR (Enduring Parental Responsibility) only be available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin and carers, and this be clarified in a formal policy position from the Directorate.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Noted by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The interim policy for Enduring Parental Responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Non-Aboriginal Care Arrangements continues to be followed. There have been no Enduring Parental Responsibility orders granted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Non-Aboriginal Care Arrangements during this reporting window.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

HCSD is considering this recommendation as part of the suite amendments to modernise the CYP Act.

RECOMMENDATION 27

Active referrals and follow-up

The Steering Committee recommend that when referring a child or family to a program or service and where the family agrees, the case worker accompany the family to the new service to introduce them onto the service. The case worker should ensure that families have practical supports in place to access these services. The case worker must then monitor the delivery of services to ensure that they are of a high quality, appropriate and delivered to families.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

The Referrals Team is now fully established with recruitment largely completed. The team consists of 1 Director, 1 Team Leader, a Senior Referrals Officer, a Referrals Officer and an Administrative Assistant.

The team now acts as a single point of access for CYF practitioners to refer to CYF panel providers within the sustaining family's program and wider support funded by the HCSD and broader community service sector. It focuses on children and families at medium to high risk of being involved with the child protection system, ensuring effective support is in place for children to return home and supporting stability in carer family households.

To date, the team has completed 201 referrals to both CYF funded providers and community providers from 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025.

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

Over the next 6 months the team will continue to build relationships with community sector providers, support new providers joining the CYF Panel and embed referral pathways.

RECOMMENDATION 28

Family connection practices

The Steering Committee recommend that family connection, otherwise referred to as contact, must be revisited for each child currently subject to an interim, final short term, or final long-term order. Family connection arrangements must be aligned to contemporary, evidence-based practice to support growth of resilient family relationships. Family connection should be frequent, facilitate high quality relationship building and be in natural settings to facilitate the growth and maintenance of family relationships.

Presented by the OBOW Steering Committee December 2019. Agreed by the ACT Government July 2020.

ACTIVITIES JULY-DECEMBER 2025

During this reporting period, the emerging Child Placement Principle Review process was formalised within draft policy and procedure documents.

The Placement Review is conducted to assess the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. Specifically, the review measures the practice conducted by the primary case management team with respect to ensuring each child is supported in adherence to the 5 inter-related elements.

Upon completion and evaluation of the Placement Review, an outcome summary will be provided with key recommendations for the primary case management team to address if necessary. The key recommendations will aim to improve the cultural care for children in OoHC and serve to protect future generations from devastating effects of removal from family, community, culture and country.

As an example, recommendations can be in relation to:

- Analysing family time to determine if it meets the family needs, as per location, if it needs to be supervised, and whether it needs to be increased.
- How ACCO's are being engaged and prioritized as the safe service to support the family.
- If Cultural Plans are family-led and informed, and ensuring children return to country and attend significant events.
- How self-determination is employed by the family to inform every decision that affects the children and their family.

It is planned the Placement Principle Review will be shared with the OBOW committee during this reporting period.

Our Booris, Our Way Review

Implementation Update July-December 2025

Additionally, the Family Connection and Restoration Team within the broader First Nations Family Response and Engagement Unit continue to conduct their daily practice of Desktop Reviews (deep dives) and Restoration Viability Assessments.

For the families that do not proceed past these 2 points, significant recommendations are provided to the primary case management team with a core focus of improving cultural care and bolstering adherence to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, and its 5 inter-related elements.

As an example of recommendations, the following is provided:

- Strengthening connections to birth parents, siblings and kin by improving Family Time arrangements (connection).
- Direction to improve practice of involving the birth parents and kin in decision making (participation).
- Referrals to FGC to support family-led decision making (participation, connection and prevention).
- Improving and prioritising the use of ACCO's (partnership and participation).
- Ensuring Father Inclusive Practice (all 5 inter-related elements).

IN THE NEXT 6 MONTHS – JANUARY-JUNE 2026

For the next 6 months, the focus of the teams that contribute to recommendation 28 will be to:

- Continue the previous 6-months intentions.
- Advertise positions and recruit First Nations applicants.
- Fully embed the Child Placement Principle Review process.