

**SSI** multicultural foster care  
strengthening children through culture

## Culturally Responsive Practice Approach

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# Culturally Responsive Practice Approach

## Key messages

Culture is central to the SSI Multicultural Child and Family Program's (MCFP) values and goals, and will remain at the forefront of our policy, procedures and practice.

Culture is core to making or changing placements and facilitating permanency.

Ongoing development of cross-cultural skills are a requirement for all staff, volunteers and carers and supported through culturally responsive training.

Cultural care planning and review involves input from children, families and other significant family and/or community members.

Family details and histories are sought and recorded, and events of significance celebrated for children and young people in the program.

First language is used when communicating to children, carers and families.

Recruitment, training, and support is ongoing for bilingual carers and caseworkers to maximise the number of adults who communicate with children and young people in their first language.

Collaboration with ethnic specific services, ethnic leaders, organisations and communities increase capacity to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

Community-based connections facilitate opportunities for children, young people, families and carers to access services to support their needs and improve outcomes.

Culturally competent practices are integrated across the organisation in individual casework with children, carers and family, across program systems and organisational levels.

Culture is dynamic and practice should be continually monitored through purposeful use of data and client feedback to ensure culturally responsiveness practice.

# What is the MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Approach?

Every child has a right to a safe, happy and permanent home connected to family and community.

We do this by strengthening children through culture.

Settlement Services International (SSI), through its Multicultural Child and Family Program (MCFP), is committed to meeting children's permanent care needs and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people by providing safe, stable and nurturing homes. All MCFP services, staff and carers are dedicated to culturally aware, culturally responsive and culturally proactive practice that is focused on the best interests of children, young people and their families.

Our Culturally Responsive Practice Approach (CRP) provides client centred, strengths-based, evidence informed guidance for staff and carers to achieve sustainable and practical outcomes for children, young people, families, carers and communities from diverse cultures, faiths, language groups and ethnic backgrounds.

We believe children in care who are supported to learn about and maintain a connection to their ethnic background, religion and language have better outcomes. These connections help children to understand where they have come from and to develop their sense of belonging and identity. Helping children stay connected with their cultural background, language and faith also helps children maintain positive relationships with their birth parents, extended family and community. We recognise the importance of this should children be returned to parental care, and in staying connected into their adult years.

## Key Terms

### **Culture**

Consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective.

### **Cultural identity**

A sense of belonging based on one's ancestry, cultural heritage, values, traditions, rituals, and often, language and religion.

### **Cultural awareness**

Being cognisant, observant, and conscious of similarities and differences among and between cultural groups.

### **Cultural competence**

The ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact across cultures. Cultural competence is a reflection of combinations of what we know, what we want to know and what we can pass on. Cultural competency becomes an integral part of a continuous learning process.

### **Culturally proactive**

Implementation of culturally responsive practice at an individual, systems and organisational level and active promotion of innovative practice initiatives, program development and organisational cultural competence.





## Why do we need a culturally responsive practice approach?

Legislation, standards and policies within the Australian child and family services sector justifiably focus on achieving the safety, health and wellbeing of children and all highlight the importance of maintaining children's identity, culture, religion and connections.

Generally, in the sector there is little guidance for child and family practitioners for their work with children<sup>1</sup>, families and carers from diverse cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. It is often the case that children's cultural, religious and linguistic needs are, in practice, secondary considerations.

Over time, MCFP has developed and implemented a range of culturally responsive systems, processes and practices across its foster care and family preservation services.

The SSI MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Approach aims to:

- Build on and document SSI MCFP culturally responsive initiatives
- Harness the skills, knowledge and lived experience of staff, carers and children
- Provide a cultural practice framework that embeds culturally responsive practice within the legislative, regulatory and policy requirements of the NSW child and family services sector
- Recognise the critical nature of culture, identity and 'belonging' as integral to the safety, health and welfare of children who have experienced trauma(s), loss of attachment and displacement.

Every aspect of the child's culture is important in ensuring that they receive quality service

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'children' is used throughout this document to denote 'children and young people'.

## What informs the MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Approach?

The MCFP has drawn on multiple sources of knowledge to develop our Culturally Responsive Practice Approach. These include:

- Procedural
- Empirical
- Theoretical
- Personal
- Practice wisdom

### Information from legislation and policy (procedural knowledge)

**NSW legislation and government policy** require agencies working with children to maintain the culture of children. Important documents include:

- **National Child Protection Framework 2009-2020** signed by all Australian states and territories. Recommendation 5 states that "Departments are to develop 'culturally responsive' service models for children and families from CALD and refugee backgrounds including:
  - Recruitment and retention of culturally diverse child protection workforce and bi-cultural staff
  - Development of interpreter guidelines and training on the use of interpreters for frontline child protection practitioners
  - Recruitment strategies of foster and kinship carers from CALD and refugee backgrounds
  - Development of practice guidelines for working with CALD and refugee families
  - Development of cultural support plans for CALD and refugee children and young people who are placed in out-of-home care (OOHC)."
- **The NSW Children and Young Person Act (Care and Protection) 1998 (S.9)** outlines the principle: "Account must be taken of the culture, disability, language, religion and sexual orientation of the child".
- **The NSW Child Safe Standard for Permanent Care - Standard 4** states that: "Children have a positive sense of identity" demonstrated by taking the child and young person's cultural needs into account for placement decisions, permanency planning, life story work, meaningful connections to family community, language and spirituality.

- **The NSW Permanency Support Program** specifies that foster care agencies must: “Support children to maintain safe, positive relationships with their family and significant others, participate in their community, and be connected to their culture”.
- **The NSW Practice Framework** states that “culture is ever-present” and the NSW Practice Framework Standards identify “culturally safe practice with diverse communities”.

These documents provide guidance to ensure:

- The preservation of the family name, identity, language, cultural and religious ties.
- Children are cared for by people who share and/or understand and respect their faith, culture and language.
- Active consideration is given to the child’s culture/s, disability, language/s, faith and sexuality in activities and decisions that have an impact on children’s care.
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, that the children are placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles.
- Care records are clearly documented and reviewed to capture social and cultural information regarding children and their families as well as strategies to facilitate, maintain and strengthen cultural connections.

Other important policy documents informing culturally responsive practice in Australia include:

- **The United Nations Treaty ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (CROC)** – the principle and legislated requirement to maintain continuity and connection for a child in alternative care to their ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic heritage is enshrined explicitly in Article 20.
- In relation to children who experience child abuse and are from CALD backgrounds, the following articles of the UNCROC are especially relevant:
  - Article 19: Protection from abuse and neglect
  - Article 14: Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion
  - Article 30: Right to practice own religion and culture for Indigenous and minority children.
- The states and territory governments are bound by the UNCROC and have incorporated the UNCROC obligations into their relevant child protection legislation.
- **National Standards in Out of Home Care - Standard 10** – “Children in care are supported to develop their identity, safely and appropriately, through contact with their families, friends, culture, spiritual sources and communities and have their life history recorded as they grow up.”

## Information from research (empirical knowledge)

### Out of Home Care in Australia

- There is a lack of attention to issues of cultural diversity in Australian OOH research and it is likely that factors such as poverty and disadvantage, parental and family mental health, trauma, poor social capital, low educational attainment, and unemployment are potentially exacerbated in CALD communities by post-migration stressors such as racial and ethnic discrimination, loss of family supports and disrupted social networks and the cultural dislocation of parenting in a new context.<sup>2</sup>
- Despite the lack of data on the representation of CALD children and young people in care, there are indications that cultural diversity is on an upward trajectory in the OOH system in Australia overall.<sup>3</sup>
- It is ‘important that culture is neither overlooked nor used to essentialise [or stereotype] the needs of ethnic minority families.’<sup>4</sup>
- OOH for children from culturally diverse communities in Australia is characterised by a lack of multicultural carers and caseworkers, lack of CALD specific carer training and resources (translated material) and a need for more cultural awareness education through professional development for caseworkers.<sup>5</sup>
- OOH service systems and procedures that support cultural maintenance include:
  - Cultural matching of the child and carer, caseworker or bi-cultural support worker
  - Well planned and active cultural care plans
  - Balancing cultural and other considerations in placement decisions
  - Foster carer support groups
  - Responding to complexities in the child’s cultural identity
  - Access to accurate information on cultural identity.

2 POCLS Literature Review 2019

3 Fostering NSW, 2013; Vicary, 2015

4 Sawrikar, P & Katz, I. ‘Normalizing the Novel’: How Is Culture Addressed in Child Protection Work With Ethnic-Minority Families in Australia? *Journal of Social Service Research*, 40:39–61, 2014

5 Burke, S & Paxman, M. (2008) Children and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds in out-of-home care in NSW - September 2008 - Research report NSW Family and Community Services

## Culturally and linguistically diverse families

- Key factors impacting culturally diverse families' interaction with the child protection system are:
  - Language barriers and interpreter usage
  - Lack of awareness of child protection laws and system
  - Fear of authority
  - Lack of family support or social isolation.<sup>6</sup>
- Family strengths identified for CALD families involved in the child protection system include:
  - Willingness to engage with child protection authorities
  - Acknowledging the availability of extended family and community support
  - Preservation of cultural heritage that helps to maintain a sense of belonging to individuals and groups that may feel socially excluded from the mainstream
  - Resilience
  - Secure attachment behaviours.
- Evidence shows that when there is a lack of cultural responsiveness, health outcomes are much poorer. Improving cultural responsiveness cannot only remove barriers to accessing healthcare, but may also reduce inequitable health outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable groups.

## Foster carers

### Foster care practices that maintain cultural identity include:

- Being responsive to cultural identity
- Being open about cultural differences
- Providing access to cultural texts and activities
- Speaking or teaching language
- Practicing or instruction in religion
- Maintaining networks with community
- Providing familiar food
- Being responsive to social customs

### Foster carer attributes that support cultural maintenance include:

- Commitment to maintain the child's culture
- Ability to maintain culture in complex care
- Respect for the child's right to participate in decisions about engagement with their birth culture

## Information from theories (theoretical knowledge)

The MCFP CRP Approach is informed by multiple theories that underpin 'good practice' in working with children in child and family work including theories about:

- Attachment
- Trauma
- Child development
- Loss and grief
- Multiculturalism
- Behaviour
- Ecology
- Change and transition
- Resilience
- Parenting
- Communication
- Anthropology
- Culture and identity
- Education
- Community development
- Social learning theory



6 Sawrikar & Katz (2014)

## The views of children in OOHC and their carers (personal knowledge)

Children with an experience of OOHC can provide the strongest insights regarding how the system works and where it might be improved. Hearing and listening to their experiences of life from within the OOHC system provides rare and valuable opportunities for workers, policy makers and decision makers within the child protection sector. We listened to the 'voices of the children' and they told us what is important to them in maintaining their cultural identity and staying connected to their culture and heritage.

### Children told us<sup>7</sup>:

#### Cultural practices that are VERY IMPORTANT to children

- Children's connections with their family (parents, siblings, extended family) are prioritised
- Children are provided with books, movies, other activities in language
- Carers and children share the same religion/spiritual beliefs/faith
- Children are supported to learn about their cultural history
- Carers and MCFP staff attend cultural competency learning and development activities to learn about different cultures and how to respond to people whose culture is different to their own
- Caseworkers support care environment/carers to be responsive to their cultural background (dress, cultural practices, décor, furnishing etc.)

SSI recognises the important role of foster carers in providing safe nurturing homes for children. The carer's contribution to the safety, health and well-being of children in care is crucial, and their views on culturally responsive practice is integral to the development of the MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Approach.

### Carers told us<sup>8</sup>:

#### Cultural practices that are VERY IMPORTANT to carers

- Carers and children share the same ethnic background
- Children and carers should speak the same language
- Children and caseworkers should speak the same language
- Children attend religious activities regularly
- Children attend cultural events
- Children are supported to learn about their cultural history
- Children's connections with their family (parents, siblings, extended family) are prioritised
- Carers and the home/care environment includes aspects of a child's cultural background (dress, cultural practices, décor, furnishing etc)
- Children are provided with books, movies, other activities in language
- Carers and children share the same religion/spiritual beliefs/faith
- Caseworkers support care environment/carers to be responsive to their cultural background (dress, cultural practices, décor, furnishing etc.)

7 Information source: MCFP children's survey conducted in May 2021 involving 25 children aged 8-22yrs who responded to a survey conducted by MCFP staff. It is important to note that the information is generalised and not all children responded that culturally responsive practices were important to them.

8 Information source: MCFP carers survey conducted in May 2021 involving 41 carers who responded to a survey conducted by MCFP staff. It is important to note that the information is generalised.



## Practice wisdom<sup>9</sup>

Practitioner knowledge of culturally responsive practices is acknowledged as an important ingredient in developing a sound practice approach. Practitioners know 'what works' in their interactions with children, young people, carers and families from cultural and linguistically diverse communities and provide valuable insight into working with ethnic communities and groups.

### Practitioners who work with culturally diverse individuals and communities told us:

Culturally responsive practice in child and family work is about building trusting relationships with individuals and communities to empower and build confidence to support children to live safe and happy lives. Culturally responsive practice involves culturally informed practitioners, ongoing opportunities for active support, cultural information exchange and active collaboration and partnerships built on mutual trust and respect, leading to more sustainable change.

#### Characteristics of culturally responsive practice in child and family work

- Practitioners start from the point of view of the child and maintain the focus on the child or young person's best interests.
- Practitioners communicate 'in language'.
- Practitioners' education is fundamental and should include general culturally responsive practices and practices with specific cultures.
- Practitioners understand that cultures, ethnic and religious groups are NOT homogeneous. There are cultures within culture.
- Practitioners' interpersonal interactions must be empathetic, sensitive, open, curious and informed.
- Practitioners 'do their homework' about specific cultural practices when working with individuals & be aware that children & young people may have bi-cultural or multicultural experiences.
- Practitioners respond appropriately to individuals and communities with empathy, respect and sensitivity to different cultural norms, behaviours, expectations, and decision making practices.
- Practitioners mitigate 'cultural elitism' by acknowledging their own cultural experiences and bias and the possible impact of their behaviour on others.
- Sector and organisational systems and processes are culturally responsive if work with individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds is going to be successful.
- Practitioners understand the important role of 'community connection' in culturally and linguistically diverse communities when working with individuals.
- Practitioners collaborate with cultural leaders, communities and sub groups as well as the child, young person, carer and their family.
- It takes a village - practitioners have an understanding of different 'family' structures and child rearing systems and practices.

Cultural responsiveness is more than an understanding of cultural background, or language or faith, it is all aspects of self. It is about strengthening the sense of self and identity.

<sup>9</sup> MCFP conducted four focus groups in 2021 with MCFP staff, SSI staff and key external stakeholders with expertise in culturally responsive practice.

# The SSI MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Model



## Foundations for MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice

### SSI vision and values

**CULTURE is central to SSI vision and values**

#### SSI vision

To achieve a society that values the diversity of its people and actively provide support to ensure meaningful social and economic participation and to assist individuals (including children and families) to reach their potential.

#### SSI values

##### **Social justice**

Equity and access to all

##### **Diversity**

Respecting diversity and being non-discriminatory

##### **Compassion**

Caring, empathy and respect for the dignity of others

##### **Quality**

Dynamic, flexible and responsive service

##### **Ethics**

Professional practices and accountability

##### **Innovation**

Commitment to partnerships and excellence

## SSI Culturally Responsive Framework

SSI recognises the importance of creating culturally safe services that are non-threatening to client identity and commits to organisational structures that reflect the ability of its systems to provide care for people with diverse values, beliefs or behaviours.<sup>10</sup> SSI has committed to implementing key structures that facilitate better outcomes for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The SSI Culturally Responsive Framework outlines key elements which reflect SSI's commitment to culturally responsive practices including:

- **Organisation-wide commitment to cultural responsiveness**
- **Leadership**
- **Workforce**
- **Inclusive of the diverse views of clients**
- **Advocacy, collaboration and partnership**
- **Research, evidence and credibility**

## MCFP Building Blocks for Culturally Responsive Practice

### MCFP Practice Principles

The SSI MCFP is focused on:

**Keeping children safe in stable placements, connected to family, community and culture**

The MCFP practice principles are based on 'what works' for children and their families and provide guidance to all staff across all work. The MCFP practice principles reflect key messages from contemporary research and government policy. All interaction with children, young people, carers, families and communities is based on the following practice principles:

Child-centred	Culturally responsive	Evidence-informed	Permanency focused
Trauma-informed	Strengths-based	Family focused	Partnership based

<sup>10</sup> (Foronda, 2008; Betancourt et al, 2002; Ramsden, 1990, Cross et al, 1989)

## Understanding culture and culturally responsive practice

It is necessary to understand culture before practice can be culturally responsive. Culture is not easy to define. Culture changes over time and members of different cultural or ethnic groups will not always think and act in the same way. Cultural considerations are relevant to all children, whether or not their cultural identity is the same as the dominant culture.

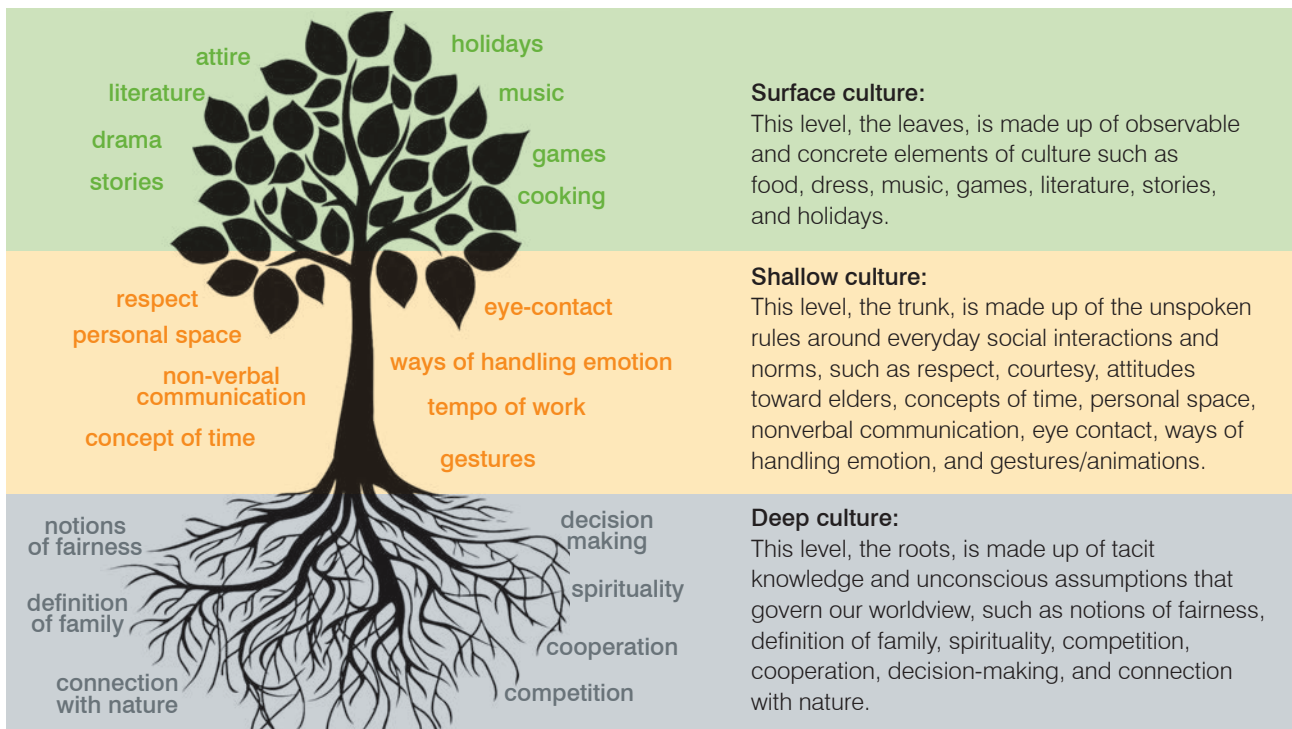
Every country, every community are strongly tied together by an intricate tapestry of individual values, norms and a specific history, so to understand their culture is to understand them. Culture and its impact on the community is a multifaceted entity which gives strength, identity and purpose to its people.

To be culturally responsive we need to acknowledge and understand the cultural characteristics of people and communities that we can see (visible aspects of culture) and those we can't see (invisible aspects of culture).

The Culture Tree<sup>11</sup> provides a helpful analogy to help us understand the complexity of culture.

'Culture is to people as water is to fish – we take our own culture for granted as it is part of our identity and part of our very being.'<sup>12</sup>

### The Culture Tree – our cultural frames of reference



11 Adapted By Charles Alexander, Jennifer Craft, and Marya Hay of Montgomery County Public Schools (MD) from Zaretta Hammond's (2015) Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

12 Dr. Alf Bablett (Aboriginal leader) in Cultural Connections Booklet – Child Australia 2017

Culturally responsive practice involves much more than just understanding culture. It requires organisational leadership, policies and structures to build systems, practices and people to develop and grow their capability in working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The cultural capability of organisations, systems and people may be plotted on a continuum such as:





# MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice

Culturally responsive practice requires integration and congruency across all levels of the organisation which means all internal and external interactions consider culture as integral to good practice. Cultural responsiveness is a way of working – it is not an ‘add-on’ or afterthought. SSI and the MCFP view all interactions through a cultural lens and culturally responsive practice as the responsibility of the Board and all staff and carers.

For practice to be truly culturally responsive, it must be integrated across three intersecting interrelated levels across the organisation.

**Culturally responsive practice in the MCFP occurs on three levels:**



## 1. Organisational characteristics that promote culturally responsive practice

### Key elements and deliverables

#### A whole-of-organisation commitment to cultural responsiveness

##### Deliverables:

- Strategic and business plans reflect working with diverse cultures in service planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Policies and practices reflect culturally responsive approaches to engaging staff and service users.
- Culturally specific policies are developed, implemented and reviewed which consider and respect cultures individually and broadly.
- Commitment to collaborating with other organisations including government, for profit, non for profit, peaks and others which work with diverse communities as well as specific ethnic or community organisations and groups.
- Organisational commitment to building capacity through systems support and processes which facilitate inclusive service delivery.
- Executive sponsorship leads cultural diversity practice leadership with representatives across the organisation structure as champions, who facilitate information sharing that reflects on culturally responsive practices.

#### Leadership

##### Deliverables:

- Proactive support from senior management.
- Leaders demonstrate reflect commitment through such behaviours as participating in training.
- Leaders are held to account for specified outcomes relating to workforce diversity and inclusion, and equitable outcomes for all consumers.

## Workforce

### Deliverables:

- Strategic activities are directed at recruiting, retaining and promoting CALD staff.
- Staff at all levels are provided with professional development opportunities to enhance their cultural responsiveness.
- Data held and reported on cultural and other staff diversity characteristics, including capacity to work across programs.
- All positions recruited include a desirable characteristic of diversity.
- Position descriptions include commitment to cultural responsiveness.
- Staff work with accredited interpreters and/or bilingual staff as needed to facilitate engagement with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Practice guides implemented for bilingual staff who work across programs proactively outlining commitment to confidentiality and privacy and other program specific competency development.

## Service delivery design capacity building to include consumer participation of clients from diverse backgrounds

### Deliverables:

- An inclusive service design approach includes input from CALD carers, children, volunteers and community members who are involved in the planning, improvement and review of programs and services on an ongoing basis.
- Commitment to consumer input is communicated through multiple modes including translated material in-language and other engagement modes including through community leaders, face-to-face and in writing.
- SSI environments reflect cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness. Signage in-language. Where areas are labelled, cultural names are considered.
- Services use culturally appropriate assessment tools to understand consumer's issues and considers history, traditions, values and attitudes, language and religion and communications.
- Services demonstrate accessibility free of barriers and discrimination.

## Advocacy, collaboration and partnership

### Deliverables:

- Resources are allocated to advocating and collaborating with key government and broader community stakeholders working with people from CALD backgrounds.
- Collaboration with local ethnic and local community services includes Aboriginal and CALD communities.
- Educative and community engagement strategies focus on building service users.
- Knowledge on local laws, community practices and settlement needs. Key topic areas include:
- Child protection and the law in Australia, including FGM and arranged marriage.
- Building Stronger Families
- Parenting in Australia: PPP, 123 Magic, Raising Tweens

## Research, evidence and credibility

### Deliverables:

- Activities are undertaken and resources allocated to building research data and measuring outcomes evaluating and reviewing culturally responsive service delivery.
- Data is collected on the cultural and linguistic diversity of consumers to identify challenges and to help design products and services.
- Data is captured and reported on workforce.
- Data is captured and reported on from individuals (children and adults) on the cultural appropriateness of particular programs, services or approaches.

## 2. SSI systems for culturally responsive practice

SSI's MCFP is committed to providing culturally responsive practices and has implemented multiple systems to embed culturally responsive practice across all service delivery.

**Key drivers underpinning the development of culturally responsive systems include:**

### Understanding

- Communication in children's first language is paramount to achieving the best possible outcomes for CALD children and young people in OOHC.
- Community-based connections facilitate opportunities for children and young people, families and carers to access services to meet their needs and improve outcomes.

### Commitment

- Ongoing development of cross-cultural skills is a requirement for all staff, volunteers and carers.
- Celebration of cultural diversity.
- Collaboration with ethnic specific services, ethnic leaders, organisations and communities assists to increase capacity to engage with CALD communities.
- Integration of culturally competent practices across the organisation as well as at individual casework, carer and/or family support and community engagement levels.

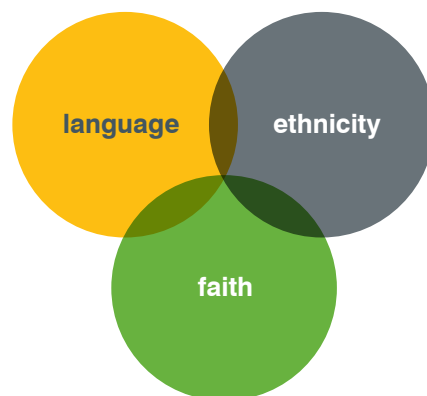
### 2.1 Shared understanding of culture

SSI promotes and believes that a shared understanding of what is meant by the term culture is fundamental to delivering competent cultural engagement with children, families and communities.

For MCFP, culture includes consideration of at least three elements; language, ethnicity and faith.

The MCFP program recognises the meaning of culture:

- as a way of life of people which includes their values and norms
- can mean different things to different people
- is linked to identity
- provides a sense of belonging and familiarity
- provides connections between people, traditions and generations
- provides a way of communicating
- provides guidance in establishing routines and behaviour



### 2.2 Data and reporting

Records of children and young people's journey in care with MCFP are robustly maintained to:




- ensure the child's story is adequately captured for them – to support their adult understanding of decisions and actions that affected their lives.
- provide evidence and information for decision-making – assessments, consultations, case planning, safety plans and others.
- provide evidence of adherence to MCFP systems and procedural requirements based on regulations, standards and practice benchmarks.

## 2.3 Cultural matching

Effective cultural matching contributes to facilitating and building relationships, communication and prevents placement breakdown.<sup>13</sup>

Children's cultural care needs are addressed through culturally matching children with foster carers and/or with a bilingual caseworker or with a bilingual support worker and/or building a non-culturally matched carer's capacity to be responsive to children's care and cultural needs.

**SSI recognises the key factors of cultural matching to be:**

Cultural element	Practice considerations
 language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Consider the child's first language.</li><li>● Matching the child's first language as the minimum criteria for a cultural match, wherever this is possible, is paramount to achieving the best possible outcomes for CALD children placed with authorised carers.</li></ul>
 ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Where were the child or their parents or grandparents born?</li><li>● How connected have been/is the family to their ethnic community?</li><li>● Are there refugee/trauma issues associated with the country of birth?</li></ul>
 faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What is the child's or parents' or grandparents' faith?</li><li>● How active have parents/grandparents been in practicing the faith?</li><li>● What are the expectations of the child's practice?</li><li>● What role does faith have in everyday life?</li></ul>

It is important to remember that a child's heritage may be a multi or bi-cultural and focusing on one cultural element may limit capacity to meet the child's cultural needs. This is particularly important if a child has mixed heritage.

<sup>13</sup> ACWA, Children and Young People in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in OOH in NSW, Support strategies, challenges and issues. A Qualitative Research Report 2006.

## 2.4 Trauma-informed

SSI acknowledges the importance of recognising and responding to the impact of trauma for a child and our practices are trauma-informed in all our interactions with children, carers and families who have experienced child protection and care capacity concerns.

Where children and families are also survivors of torture and trauma, SSI works with specialist services such as, the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). This work aims to facilitate services to children including culturally appropriate counselling and therapy.

In providing for the permanency and culturally responsive care needs for refugee children, consideration is given to the carer's capacity to respond to potentially associated impacts from the torture and trauma.

There are circumstances, often related to past traumatic incidents, where children say they do not wish to relate to their culture. In such circumstances MCFP conducts regular reviews of cultural care planning that includes supporting children to explore trauma and offering opportunities to connect with cultural elements which may facilitate re-engagement.

## 2.5 Large pool of bilingual staff

Bilingual staff are viewed as a key asset for SSI and the MCFP. Recruitment and support for bilingual and bi-cultural staff is an essential element in the MFCP. Bicultural support workers can assist both carers and other service providers to respond appropriately to children and families. MCFP recruitment practices aim to employ staff from diverse cultural, ethnic, faith and language groups. The MCFP works with internal SSI programs as well as external community groups to locate bilingual staff when needed.

Bilingual staff are supported by MCFP through reflective practice, supervision and ongoing professional development and through networks of ethnic community members and culturally relevant services. MCFP partners with culturally diverse practitioners and services to support staff to access culturally relevant external partners and networks with the expectation of co-design and co-delivery for children and families in a culturally safe and inclusive manner.

SSI recruits carers who are responsive to cultural care needs of children and families, who have knowledge and an attitude of curiosity and flexibility, and are open and willing to understand the child's culture and family. We employ carers who 'make room' in their own family routine and include and embrace the child's culture and cultural identity.

Cultural connection is maintained by ensuring that regular contact with at least one person from the child's own culture through relationships with family, community members, authorised carers, bilingual caseworker or bilingual support staff.

## 2.6 Cultural care planning

SSI includes cultural care as a core component of our assessment and permanency planning processes. This ensures that we:

- Consistently use our best practice culture specific assessment tools and cultural care planning approach.
- Plan and deliver services that reflect the specific cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds of each birth family and child.
- Coordinate wrap-around services and supports that are a 'best-fit' to the specific CALD profile of the birth family and child.
- Work collaboratively with CALD community supports and other migrant resources to be able to deploy and utilise if and when needed.

Cultural care assessments, planning and supports or action plans relate to processes of exploring, collaborating and negotiating with the birth family, their kin/relatives, as well as community connections. This will include such things as:

- The birth family's connection to their culture
- Aspects of the culture which they wish to be maintained or developed for their children
- Supports available from the birth family or from relatives or wider community members
- The views and aspirations of the child or young person, plus the views of carers
- Carer capacity and supports that carers may require to assist the child
- Direct supports and services that are currently available or need to be located to assist
- Strategies and actions to meet the child or young person's needs in general.



Cultural considerations can also include the child's:

- Cultural connections prior to the placement
- Own knowledge of their culture
- Connections with siblings
- Connections to extended family
- Proximity and access to ethnic community
- Connection with the community and its willingness to support the authorised carer and placement.

## 2.7 Culturally responsive life story work

SSI believes children who are supported to learn about and maintain a connection to their culture – their family's ethnicity, religion/s and language/s – will have better opportunities for them to stay connected to their family and community.

*My Life and Me* life story work developed by SSI is designed to provide a culturally responsive approach to life story work that focuses on the child's life and their culture. It provides an opportunity for children to have a conversation with parents, family members, carers, caseworkers and other significant people in their life, and we believe will help them to develop a positive sense of their history, identity and belonging.

## 2.8 Cultural support and training groups for carers

Mentoring and peer support for carers is provided through language specific support and training groups. These provide opportunities to develop relationships which carers and can extend outside SSI's structured training.

When communication is in language, foster carers report strengths in developing their skills to respond to the needs of children, parents and caseworkers. Where English is a second language, a shared first language communication for carers as well as parents and family members, provides significant opportunities to develop relationships, communicate, understand, and challenge child protection issues, rights and responsibilities and decisions reached by Community Services and SSI.<sup>14</sup>

Being culturally aware and responsive adds values to how carers and staff interact with each other as well as children and their families. Being culturally aware requires the time to reflect and consider personal bias and perceptions regarding one's own values and thinking as well as different cultures.

“Diversity and inclusion, which are the real grounds for creativity, must remain at the center of what we do.”

Marco Bizzarri

## 2.9 Cultural awareness training for caseworkers, carers and sector partners

SSI and MCFP design and deliver a range of culturally responsive training to staff, carers and sector partners. Culturally responsive training provides opportunity to assist carers and practitioners to consider:

- Cultural biases and assumptions
- Cultural understanding
- Context of culture in NSW
- Communication challenges and opportunities
- Collaboration challenges and opportunities

## 2.10 Building evidence informed practice

SSI is committed to implementing practices that are evidence informed. SSI works with government partners and other stakeholders to build and enhance our practices so that we can deliver the best services to children and young people and their families. We understand that evidence informed practice models allow us to learn from the experiences of other practitioners and provide services that have been demonstrated to be effective. We are continually seeking to improve our practice and seek to implement practices that contribute to the evidence base. This is especially relevant as practice leaders in multicultural services for children and young people.

SSI partnered with Macquarie University's Department of Educational Studies to publish research designed to assist government and non-government OOHc providers to develop service systems that maintain cultural identity for culturally diverse children and young people in care. The research identified key areas of practice for foster carers, carer attributes and service systems that support cultural maintenance of children in care. The findings are summarised on pages 6 and 7.

In 2021 SSI commenced a four year Australian Research Centre (ARC) Linkage project with Western Sydney, Sydney and Macquarie universities: Upholding the right to cultural connections for children in care. The research will examine the:

1. underlying issues and mechanisms that support cultural identity, belonging and connection for CALD children in foster care from the perspective of key stakeholders, including children, families and workers;

<sup>14</sup> p1, The Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre – African Sessional Workers Project Operational Guidelines.

2. service strategies currently in place to support the cultural connection of CALD children in care, including innovative community mentoring programs, and assess the combinations of strategies that are most effective in supporting positive outcomes for children as this relates to their cultural identity and wellbeing;
3. barriers and facilitators for families from diverse cultural groups to providing foster care for CALD children, which will guide the development of strategies designed to increase the pool of culturally diverse foster carers and opportunities for cultural matching;
4. issues that influence national policy and practice as this relates to supporting children in foster care to maintain their cultural identity and connections.

### 2.11 Leading advocacy, collaboration and cultural community connections

SSI recognises the value in working with community and member agencies to strengthen its knowledge and capacity to engage community members into the foster care program and facilitate increased opportunities to coordinate support programs working with children and families from CALD backgrounds.

SSI is uniquely placed in terms of working with ethno-specific organisations, and other CALD, migrant and refugee support agencies. The partnerships with member agencies provides opportunity to access local, specialised cultural expertise as well as access to local initiatives.

This cultural expertise includes:

- Culturally competent practice in multi-lingual migrant, refugee and humanitarian settlement services.
- Complex multi-faceted case management support including capacity and experience in dealing with families in crisis.
- Culturally competent practice in multilingual refugee and humanitarian settlement services with a range of CALD target groups involved in humanitarian, refugee and settlement services.
- Multicultural family support services through casework support, supported playgroups and youth services and programs.
- Child and youth support programs for intervention and prevention of the escalation of issues in early settlement
- Multi-lingual and multicultural human resource management expertise.
- Volunteer recruitment, support and coordination programs.
- Training and mentoring initiatives.
- Genuine, long standing engagement and productive relationships with CALD communities - including community leaders, groups, agencies and members.

- Collaborative interagency links with other multicultural and generalist support services in the service delivery networks, locally and regionally.
- Relationships with ethnic organisations and groups which provide opportunities for information, dialogue and support to recruiting and maintaining bilingual carers.
- Understanding that facilitating conversations with community and ethnic members to explain child protection in an appropriate cultural context can reduce defensiveness and 'open up' opportunities to access supports to raise children safely within family.

### 2.12 Culturally responsive child safe organisation

- As a child safe organisation SSI is committed to:
  - Creating environments where children's safety and wellbeing is at the centre of thought, values and actions.
  - Placing emphasis on genuine engagement with and valuing of children and young people.
  - Creating conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people.
  - Creating conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm.
  - Responding to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm.
- Culture is central to SSI's values and goals. Since its establishment in 2001, SSI's core business has been to support CALD community members and groups. It works through its commitment to match each SSI family and child to a staff member, carer and/or other support person with the same or similar CALD backgrounds or with deep understanding of that community.
- SSI's vision is to achieve a society that values the diversity of its people and actively provides support to ensure meaningful social and economic participation and to assist individuals, including children, and their families reach their potential.
- SSI is committed to improving early intervention, child protection and permanency support services to children, young people and families from CALD backgrounds.
- SSI's policies, procedures and operations reflect child safe governance, transparent decision making, inclusiveness and a commitment to working collaboratively to strengthen service delivery to assist children and families to access opportunities to achieve optimal wellbeing outcomes.

### 2.13 Commitment to 'in language' communication

SSI collaborate with communities, service providers and government to provide culturally relevant resources and communication to all service users. This is achieved by:

- Information in multiple languages on the SSI website
- Effective use of interpreters and translators
- Bilingual staff
- Consultation with community members and partnerships with ethnic service providers



### 3. Individual practitioner skills that facilitate culturally responsive practice

Culturally responsive practitioners understand that developing culturally responsive practice is a lifelong process that requires continuous self-assessments and critical thinking. It involves an understanding of:

- how power shapes difference
- knowledge of difference
- the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender and how they apply to individual or groups and impact discrimination or disadvantage
- the ways in which information is gathered, presented and processed
- the ways in which we use the skills we develop.

Cultural responsiveness is a complex process that is developed over time by engaging in a variety of activities and sources of information and taking into account the long history of oppression / trauma and people's experiences of it in their lives.

Culturally responsive practitioners must have the professional skills, knowledge, and attitudes to provide services and support within the context of the dynamic child and family services environment. This means that their practice must demonstrate:

- **Compliance with legislation, policy and standards**
- **Cultural awareness and knowledge**
- **Application of a cultural lens and demonstration of culturally responsive skills in working with children, families and communities.**



#### 3.1 Compliance with legislation, policy and standards

The main principle for administering the Child Protection Act 1999 is that:

**“the safety, wellbeing and best interests of a child, both through childhood and for the rest of the child’s life, are paramount.”**

Legislation, standards and policy in NSW require agencies working with children in out of home care to maintain the child’s family’s culture including by:

- Preserving the family name, identity, language, cultural and religious ties.
- Children being cared for by people who share and/or understand and respect their faith, culture and language.
- Actively giving consideration to the child’s culture/s, disability, language/s, faith and sexuality in activities and decisions that have an impact on children’s care.
- Applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Clearly documented care records capturing social and cultural information regarding children and their families.
- Facilitating maintenance and strengthening of cultural connections.

The NSW Practice Framework Standards is based on NSW legislation and research on practice on ‘what works’ in working with children, young people and families. These standards set out what is expected and how practice is skillfully and ethically carried out to provide a positive impact and achieve good outcomes for children, their families and communities.

Culturally responsive practitioners meet the requirements outlined in the standards<sup>15</sup> below:

### Working with family and culture

Every child is part of a family system, community, and culture. To be child focused, we must support and explore their connections.

<p><b>Enacting children and young people's rights</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Apply the conventions and charters that outline children's rights: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and the Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Out of Home Care.</li> <li>● Explore, recognise and celebrate the child's individuality and diversity. Use the holistic rights of the child to inform your casework priorities, actions and decisions.</li> <li>● Act as an ally and advocate for the child. Recognise that each child is an individual with their own experiences, but that they exist and belong within relationships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culturally safe practice with Aboriginal communities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Show respect for Aboriginal cultures and their diversity. Know and respect local Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land as well as historical and current community experiences.</li> <li>● Work alongside the child, family and community to build enduring safety, stability and cultural continuity for the child so that they are safe and thriving in community for a lifetime.</li> <li>● Consistently apply the Aboriginal Case Management Policy, Aboriginal Consultation Guide and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles in the Care Act.</li> <li>● Understand your own culture and how this may shape your perspectives and practices.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culturally safe practice with diverse communities</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Respect cultural practice and seek to understand the family's cultural worldview.</li> <li>● Reflect on your own cultural values.</li> <li>● Develop a good working knowledge of local cultural community and multicultural services and seek their expertise.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Writing and talking with children and families</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Talk with the child, family and others with empathy, acceptance, respect and curiosity, in a way that they can understand and that respects their culture, language needs and any disability.</li> <li>● Use professional judgement to write succinctly.</li> <li>● Document a fair, accurate and balanced perspective.</li> </ul>

### Building lifelong connections

Children need connections to people who make them feel loved, important and safe.

- Prioritise and value children's sustained and meaningful connections to network members.
- Focus casework, at all stages, on how best to create relational, cultural, physical and legal permanency for the child considering their safety, needs and rights.

15 Practice Framework Standards for child protection and out of home care practitioners. NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2020.



## Assessment

We view assessment as an ongoing holistic process that continually takes place regardless of where a child lives. Assessment informs our understanding of their safety, experiences and needs as well as the family's capacity for change.

### Holistic assessment

- Use assessment as a continuous process of understanding the child's changing needs and working out how these needs can be met.
- Use curiosity to understand the child, their experiences and their family as unique.
- Use Structured Decision Making tools (or Alternative Assessment) accurately alongside professional judgement to understand and establish immediate safety, understand future risk to the child and decide, where appropriate, when restoration can safely take place.
- Make timely yet well considered decisions that are informed by the relevant assessment.

### Critical reflection to improve outcomes

- Check in on your thinking and practices regularly to identify and guard against making predictable errors.
- Participate in processes that support critical reflection such as pre and post assessment consultations, cultural consultation, family-led decision-making, Group Supervision and individual supervision.
- Notice how you may have contributed to a response from the child or family. Adapt your response to them if needed.

## Influencing change

We are guided by the needs and aspirations of the child, and those of the people who love them. We seek to understand the causes and context of the issues children and families face, so we can help them find their own solutions and so that children have the best future.

### Building relationships that support change

- Recognise that the ongoing process of meeting the child's needs (whether they are in the care of their parents or others) is a process of change to meet their potential.
- Approach your work with the child and family using partnership, acceptance, empathy and curiosity.
- Foster safe networks around the child and their family that will support them as they go through change and into the future.
- Seek to understand the social inequalities that have, or do, impact on the family.

## Learning from critique

I need you to ask me what I think and if there is anything you can do better. Keep asking me for feedback and when I give it to you, listen and act on it.

### Learning from critique

- Be open to feedback (positive or challenging) and learn from this so that practice continuously improves and responds to the rights of children and families.
- Provide constructive and respectful critique (positive and challenging) to peers, leaders and other professionals so that they can be of most use to children and families.
- Be curious about the family's previous social responses from services to learn what worked, what did not work, and why the family might be reluctant or afraid.

## Purposeful partnerships

We work with families, communities and other services to create a team around the child. We draw on the diverse expertise of all the people in the child's life and the important perspectives they bring.

### Collaborating as a team around the child

- Establish a thorough understanding of who the child and family identify as their network and document these network members.
- Understand the local community and service system and develop purposeful partnerships within it.
- Harness the expertise of others by consulting with the child, family and community, and colleagues such as psychologists, casework specialists, legal officers, multicultural caseworkers, Aboriginal people, permanency coordinators and regional adoption caseworkers.

## 3.2 Cultural awareness and knowledge when working with children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Culturally aware practitioners are able to demonstrate the following:

### 3.2.1 Cultural awareness about their own culture, and associated values and assumptions on behaviour and interactions

Culturally responsive practitioners reflect on their own background, beliefs, values and lifestyle. They consider how these affect their thoughts and perceptions of the world and biases to particular ways of thinking and acting. This can often be difficult for people who belong to the dominant Anglo-Australian culture, as “culture” and “cultural diversity” are typically seen as pertaining to “others”. This process includes acknowledging any personal biases and stereotypes, recognising the influence of cultural norms and attitudes, and valuing cultural diversity and the validity of differing beliefs and values. It also involves a willingness to adapt and change our individual attitudes and biases based upon new information. To understand and appreciate the culture of others, we must first understand and appreciate our own culture.

### 3.2.2 An awareness of other cultures

This is achieved by interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds in both professional and personal life, talking with service providers and community organisations who work with culturally diverse people, researching, watching films or documentaries or reading about other cultures and cultural diversity, and participating in workshops and seminars.

### 3.2.3 Understanding that people from CALD backgrounds are not homogenous

There are many different cultural and ethnic groups and diversity within each group, as well as many other factors which affect each person’s cultural identity including:

- a person may have a bicultural or multicultural heritage
- the person’s age, gender, education, socioeconomic status
- the person’s level of proficiency in English
- the reason for migration and how long they have been living in Australia; whether the person is a first, second or later generation Australian
- the extent to which they identify with a particular cultural or ethnic group
- the person’s level of acculturation into the dominant Australian culture.

It is important to recognise that each child and family is unique and also be aware of the potential influence of specific cultural factors. This will assist child and family practitioners to not to make assumptions based on stereotypes when working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Practitioners can avoid assumptions by:

- asking for clarification when needed
- checking that what has been discussed is properly understood
- acknowledging limited understanding
- asking for assistance to increase understanding.

### 3.2.4 A working knowledge of the migration experience

An understanding of the impact of the migration experience and the settlement process is important to ensuring effective intervention when working with people from diverse backgrounds, particularly people who have recently settled in Australia. Migrating to a country with little concept of the host culture and language is a stressful experience and requires a period of adjustment. It involves leaving behind a family, a place in society, and sometimes a basic ability to communicate with those around you. It can lead to a loss of identity and a loss of self. Another common concept relating to the experience of being exposed to a different culture is that of culture shock. People migrating to a new country with different cultures may experience culture shock where their basic values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour are challenged by a different set of values, beliefs and behaviours. There are a number of stages that a person who has migrated is likely to go through as they adjust to living in their new country and it is important that practitioners understand their experience and how they are coping with their new environment.

There are common stressors and challenges that most migrants are likely to experience including:

- unemployment or underemployment
- financial stress
- the loss of support systems and networks such as extended family and friends
- the need to understand systems and practices that may differ significantly from their country of origin
- decisions about where to live and the need to find suitable housing
- the need to learn a new language.

### 3.2.5 An understanding of the refugee experience

Refugees have escaped situations that have endangered their lives and their psychological health and wellbeing. Refugees seek a new life in Australia not due to free choice, but in order to be protected. Refugees have to leave their country under extreme and harsh conditions, which does not allow them the benefit that migrants have in financially and psychologically preparing for life in another country. They have often lost family, seen and experienced atrocities, spent years in refugee camps or in transition from one country to another, and ultimately suffered a high level of trauma. Refugees have additional stressors impacting their physical, legal and psychological wellbeing in settling in a new country and may have a heightened mistrust and suspicion of government and officials.

### 3.2.6 A working knowledge of differences in child rearing practices

Culturally responsive practitioners understand that many cultures and ethnic groups have a collectivist view of parenting and child-rearing, whilst the dominant view in the Anglo-Australian culture tends towards an individualistic view. By understanding the behaviours and attitudes behind these different world views, the culturally responsive practitioner is better able to support and work with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds. While culture should not be seen as an excuse for child abuse or neglect, it is important to recognise that approaches to parenting may vary considerably across different cultural groups and recognise that the safety and wellbeing of children is often the primary aim for parents. Culturally responsive practice recognises that in some communities the extended families and communities play important roles in child rearing and supervision. It also recognises the different role males may play in discipline and decision making in relation to children, and works with parents to ensure children are safe, nurtured and provided with opportunities to grow and learn.

Culturally responsive practitioners distinguish between traditional cultural practices that are harmful to the child and those that are either beneficial, or at least not harmful, when working with children and families from diverse cultures. For example, traditional health practices such as cupping, pinching, or rubbing (which is also known as coining) which are considered health treatments amongst people of South-East Asian origin may cause marking on the skin. In situations where a traditional practice causes harm, the child's right to safety and protection needs to take precedence.

### 3.2.7 Consideration of intergenerational issues and their impacts

Intergenerational issues within families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds feature strongly in much of the literature relating to cultural diversity. There are a number of specific factors that may impact intergenerational relationships within families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including:

- The roles of elders, parents, men, women and children
- Parents may have high expectations of children's educational performance
- Overcrowding
- Children may assimilate more quickly than parents and take on some of the attitudes and behaviours of their peers, causing tension
- Due to financial stress, children may need to take on additional roles within the family
- Some families may try to preserve traditional cultural values that they recall from their country of origin but which may have adapted and changed over time in the country of origin.

### 3.2.8 Awareness of barriers to identifying and reporting child abuse

Some of the potential personal and systemic barriers to identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect that are identified in culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities include:

- A lack of understanding,
- A limited ability for some people, to read, speak or understand English
- The social isolation faced by some families who are part of a minority ethnic group and limited awareness of, or access to, support services or to services that would identify abuse
- Interrelated experiences of disadvantage faced by some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds such as financial limitations due to limited availability of affordable housing, employment and educational opportunities and unfamiliarity with surroundings
- A denial that child abuse occurs within a culture or ethnic community by some members of that community
- A fear or suspicion of authorities and government officials based on pre-migration experiences
- A reluctance to seek support because of the stigma associated with seeking help from outside of the family group
- A fear of jeopardising the person or family's residency status in Australia

- The desire to protect the reputation and standing of the family
- The view that problems are most appropriately dealt with within the family or by others within the cultural community, such as community leaders, elders or religious leaders
- Poor previous experience with the child and family sector
- Gender power imbalances which can lead to abusive situations not being reported due to the fear of being judged or harmed.

### 3.2.9 An understanding of the impacts of racism and discrimination

The need for an awareness of the impact of racism and racist abuse on some people from minority ethnic groups is critical to working effectively with people. Many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are likely to have experienced direct and indirect racism and discrimination as a part of their daily life in Australia and possibly in their country of origin.

Culturally responsive practitioners recognise that the experience of racism and discrimination is an additional and significant stress factor for people from culturally diverse communities. Research shows that it contributes to a climate of insecurity and a view of the dominant social environment as hostile and threatening. It also has significant impact on families and children who experience it in terms of their socioeconomic status, access to goods and services, and their overall participation in, and contribution to, society. The experience of racism for children can have a negative effect on self-esteem, lead to withdrawal, feeling anxious and depressed, the rejection of culture and parental values, and a sense of confusion about one's identity.

How people identify themselves is a key to their self-image

## 3.3 Culturally responsive skills in working with children, families and communities

Whilst it is not possible to cover all culturally responsive skills for working with people from specific ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds, the MCFP Culturally Responsive Practice Approach highlights the following skills when working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

### 3.3.1 Ability to listen to and engage with CALD children and young people, families and communities

Culturally responsive practitioners create meaningful and effective relationships with the child, their family, kin and carers to achieve positive culturally sensitive outcomes for children. They are curious, respectful and seek out the views, knowledge and experiences of children, their parents, extended families and community members. They spend time with children, families and kin and learn about their cultural knowledge, protocols and practices and how they can best be supported to be safe, 'belong' and reach their potential.

### 3.3.2 Maintain a focus on 'best interests' of children

Culturally responsive practitioners have the capacity to know when (and when not) to consider cultural factors with culturally and linguistically diverse families. They interpret child protection laws and policies in ways that take into account cultural differences in parenting and family functioning without compromising the equitable protection of all children from harm regardless of their cultural background. It is a balance of cultural competence and child protection service delivery across cultural groups.

### 3.3.3 Responsive integration of culturally responsive practices with other core practice skills and interventions

Culturally responsive practitioners are reflective and competent across all core elements of child and family practice. They provide culturally responsive supports to children and their families that are underpinned by child-centred, trauma-informed and strengths-based practice that is inclusive of family and community. They are able to integrate culturally responsive behaviour and skills across all areas of practice including assessment, case planning, cultural planning, life story work and support and supervision of foster carers. They ensure a cultural lens is applied to standardised child and family practice models such as family finding, SDM assessment, family group conferencing, child protection risk assessment and work with the Children's Court.

### 3.3.4 Proactive cultural planning

Culturally responsive practitioners embrace an attitude of curiosity, creativity and innovation in developing and implementing case plans and cultural plans. They understand that different family and community members play various roles in the raising of children in diverse communities. They seek to include extended family (kin) and community members to support children's cultural connections by involving them in activities such as sharing family and cultural knowledge, attending cultural events / activities and providing family time. Culturally responsive practitioners recognise searching for and involving family and community members is an ongoing process, and must be active, consistent and ongoing, even after a placement is made.

### 3.3.5 Use of appropriate communication and avoiding jargon and stereotyping

It is critical for staff working with children and families from a culture or ethnic group different from their own to recognise the uniqueness of all people and avoid stereotyping or making assumptions based on a person's ethnicity, religion, culture or language. It is also important to be aware of the potential sensitivities around the use of some terminology. Using terms such as "culturally and linguistically diverse", "non-English speaking", or "migrant" may be offensive.

The language used by practitioners must be respectful, in plain English and supported by translated written material where appropriate. Culturally responsive practitioners are sensitive and respectful to the verbal and nonverbal behaviour of children and families from different cultures and are able to adjust their own behaviour to meet the specific needs of individuals. Rather than following certain generalised communication strategies, culturally responsive practitioners connect with others 'on a human level' and show a willingness to offer something of themselves.

### 3.3.6 Cross-cultural skills

Acquiring the cross cultural competency skills is a lifelong process. Cultural competence at a personal level encompasses the worker's attitudes, knowledge and skills, and requires an acceptance that long-term, ongoing and persistent development is required. Skills include:

- effective cross-cultural communication
- working with interpreters and translators
- listening to and building on the strengths of the children, families and communities no matter where they are from
- recognising the power advocates and professionals have over the lives of children, families and communities and avoiding the imposition of the values of the system

- developing collaborative models with ethno-specific agencies and those working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- establishing effective relationships with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- reflecting on and learning from each interaction with people from different cultures to inform future practice
- monitoring access to services by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through data collection
- identifying practices and systems that hinder cultural competency
- identifying and implementing approaches that remove any barriers to working effectively with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- recognising and working against institutional disparities that adversely affect children, families and communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### 3.3.7 Ability to collect and record accurate information about cultural, linguistic and religious identity

The identification and collection of accurate and complete information about the cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds of children and families is critical to ensuring that the needs of the child can be appropriately met, as well as providing an important resource for service planning and for identifying any possible gaps in terms of access to services and support.

It is important not to make assumptions about a person's cultural, linguistic or religious background, and not to assume that a person's country of birth is a reliable indicator of cultural identity. Culturally responsive practitioners are curious, ask questions and seek information from children, families and carers. Gathering information on the child's or family's interpretation of their culture helps paint a more complete picture of their context.

Culturally responsive practitioners take responsibility for providing accurate information for the child about their cultural activity and traditions for current and future reference and to assist them to make informed decisions about their life.

### 3.3.8 Effective cross-cultural communication skills

Communication, both verbal and nonverbal, is critical to cross-cultural competence. Good communication skills are essential to effective interpersonal interactions. Culturally responsive practitioners speak to people in a way which is sensitive to their own distinct, unique culture and enables the development of a relationship based on trust and mutual respect. Actions can often speak louder than words, and in many cultures non-verbal body language speaks volumes. Therefore, being receptive to other forms of communication is important.

Greetings and titles are important in many cultures and can be a sign of respect. Handshakes can sometimes be gender dependent and some cultures bow their head as a greeting. Simply asking as well as learning through observing how families interact with other members from their community can be a useful way for you to gauge what is appropriate.

Effective cross cultural communication involves:

- understanding that there are cultural differences in non-verbal communication
- acknowledging cultural differences rather than minimising them in relation to cross-cultural communication
- remembering the meaning of non-verbal communication (eye contact, proximity, facial gestures, smiling etc) can vary significantly across different cultures, and may sometimes even have an opposite meaning
- being respectful
- making continued and sincere attempts to understand the world from others' points of view
- being open to new learning
- being flexible
- having a sense of humour
- tolerating ambiguity well
- approaching others with a desire to learn
- using an accredited professional interpreter when a person is unable to communicate
- check and use correct pronunciation of names and the correct or preferred way of addressing a person
- using plain English and clear enunciation
- using concrete instead of abstract language and avoid the use of idioms, irony, sarcasm, slang and jargon
- being patient, receptive and listen carefully to everything that is said
- avoiding any tendency to equate the person's level of language skill or accent with level of intelligence or credibility

- asking open-ended questions
- making sure that the other person understands what you have said and that you understand what they have said.

### 3.3.9 Effective use of interpreters

Wherever possible, culturally responsive practitioners use professional, qualified interpreters who are trained in maintaining confidentiality and accuracy. It can be problematic to use children, friends and other people, and should be avoided. When using an interpreter (on site or telephone) it is important to confirm the language and dialect needs of the client, any gender preferences that they might have in relation to the interpreter and the preferred interpreting mode. Good practices when working with interpreters include:

- brief the interpreter beforehand wherever possible, explaining the purpose of the interview or meeting
- allow for the extra time that is likely to be needed when using an interpreter
- introduce yourself and the interpreter to the client and explain clearly who you are and your role
- speak directly to the client rather than addressing the client through the interpreter and look at the client when speaking and listening to them
- maintain control of the interview
- pause often to allow the interpreter to speak
- speak clearly and more slowly, but not loudly
- avoid using slang or technical jargon
- make sure that the interpreter understands any difficult concepts that you are trying to convey
- periodically check on the client's understanding of what has been said by asking them, through the interpreter, to repeat in their own words what has been communicated
- summarise what has been agreed during the meeting and check if the client has any questions
- debrief the interpreter if necessary after the interview once the client has left.



### **3.3.10 Ability to establish and maintain links with ethnic service providers and involve CALD community members in the development, implementation and review of policies, programs and services**

The child, the family and the MCFP do not exist in isolation. They are all part of a much wider community.

When child and family practitioners develop links, share information, and work in collaboration, they are better able to achieve the best outcomes for children and families. Partnership between the child safety services, child and family community service providers and CALD communities is important to creating a better understanding of the service systems and child safety legislation. Establishing links between services can assist staff to develop knowledge about working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, provide opportunities for working collaboratively to support children and families, and facilitate appropriate referrals to relevant services.

Culturally responsive practitioners work collaboratively with ethnic community organisations, elders and others to:

- Develop and articulate a common understanding of issues, needs and solutions
- Identify culturally appropriate practices to promote child safety and wellbeing
- Leverage financial, technical and human resources and expertise
- Generate innovation and improvements in service provision
- Streamline referral processes, family finding and build cultural connection for children and families.

### **3.3.11 Establishing culturally appropriate placements**

Inappropriate placements and practice compound earlier harm and leave some young people confused about their histories, culture and identity, with low self-esteem and, for some, long term mental health problems.

Culturally responsive practitioners ensure children and young people in OOHC maintain their links with their family and kin and with their ethnic, religious and cultural identity and values. They consider all aspects of the child's culture such as faith, language and ethnicity and do not make assumptions about the child's needs based on a perceived cultural identity, but check with the child and family.





