REFOCUS
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation
REFOCUS was founded in 2010 to provide cultural services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in the Moreton Bay, Sunshine Coast and Gympie regions. The agency’s main focus is ensuring that services and support is grass roots, authentic, dependable, professional, and sustainable. REFOCUS services support children and their families stand for their voice empowering families to be heard and believe their voice matters (everything is possible).

Some Of our Deadly Team “Stylin up”

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QHuFBvmiwJ0
The focus of this presentation...

How REFOCUS has developed an authentic and unique cultural practice in the early intervention space

Discussing the initiative: Early Indigenous Response Collective
Finding the common Ground:

When we try to find out what we might have in common with another person it transforms the conversation.

As you reveal more about yourself, the real you emerges, and when you stumble upon something you have in common with another person, it instantly unites you - creating a meaningful connection.

Through connections of a common ground and a common need...the Early Indigenous Response Collective was founded
**Loyalty is Everything**

- At REFOCUS we are about loyalty. Loyalty to you, our people & to our clients. Loyalty is huge for us.
- It’s about helping people feel they belong.
- Helping you feel appreciated for all that you have done. Helping our clients feel at home. It’s about connecting with clients as people, not as tasks to process, but as humans, just like us. Warm heartfelt belonging that is the stuff of heart-warming memories *(Heart Print)*. Theirs and yours.
- Creating connection through loyalty means we all need to recognise the critical role each one of us plays – what you do matters and that it means something.

**Neutrality experience the Balance**

- Neutrality removes the energetic charge that leads to reaction and symptoms.
- This is REFOCUS’s successful pillar. When you catch the wave of neutrality this is where the power is to manifest lasting change for our clients and community.
- When we’re neutral – annoyances and limitations no longer inhibit us from reaching our full human potential for you, our clients and our business. *(example past in your present, Standards, Ideals, belief systems, decision making to keep you safe)*

**Authenticity - Your True Self**

“The authentic self is the you that can be found at your absolute core. It is the part of you that is not defined by your job, or your role. It is the multiple pieces of all your unique gifts, skills, abilities, interests, talents, insights and wisdoms. It is all your strengths and values that are uniquely yours and need expression, versus what you think you are ‘supposed to be and do’. It is the you that flourished, unself-consciously, in those times of your life when you felt happiest and most fulfilled.” *(then adults happened)*
Purpose of the Collective

The Early Indigenous Response Collective engages in early assessment and planning to ensure responses are timely and families are connected to the right support, avoiding the need for statutory intervention.

This unique initiative was created by Darcy Cavanagh with the support of Julieann Cork, Julie Smith, Chris Campbell, Rachelle Towie the support from the Department was needed as it was them who had to enact the initiative based on everyone's common ground: Over Representation and Authentic Cultural Practice.
Origin of the Collective

REFOCUS were delivering the Recognised Entity at this time and knew there was a huge I&A’s back log awaiting commencement.

Collective Idea began
Were these families really needing an investigation if they were sitting waiting to be commenced? Why not get support in there now? Why not have an all aboriginal panel discuss the waiting IA’s and recommend what would be the best action for these families, Why not have no contact with the department?.
Locally in Maroochydore, it was noted around the time of this group’s inception in April 2017, a large proportion (25%) of assessments awaiting commencement were in relation to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families.

Around the same time as this group’s establishment, the Queensland Government signed the Family Matters national campaign’s Statement of Commitment to ensure Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.
The Family Matters Report 2017 speaks to reducing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home-care within a generation (2040) and was closely followed by the release of the Our Way Strategy and first action plan, Changing Tracks, which builds on the prevention and early intervention approach of the Supporting Families Changing Futures reform.
Sunshine Coast Collective Members

Majority of Panel members Are to Be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
(This Membership changes based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representation).

Intensive Family Support Services, United Synergies
Family Wellbeing Service REFOCUS
FPP REFOCUS
FACC Act for Kids
D’Jinang Djaa Coordinator, IFYS Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Foster Care Program
Assessment and Service Connect, IFYS
Department Child safety Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff

Assessments Team Leader and or Senior Practitioner, Department of Child Safety
Collective members
(Confidentiality was a factor in this membership).
Some of the collective members
Connection to Traditional Owners and Community Elders

The membership are to remember they are present in the space of being an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person/community member first and foremost and only when needed they bring their paid role into the meeting. The core members are to keep in mind the recommendations they make are keeping to the grass roots of what family is for the individual family, keep in mind what the community and the Elders would say and think of what is being proposed. (Members are speaking as a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative not just their role)

Connection of this group to Traditional Owners and community Elders is maintained through core member’s connection and relationships within community. The group recognises the voice of Elders being able to hold some distance from decision-making in Child Protection, maintaining a role of independence so as not to be seen as a department supporter, however when they do participate the wisdom they bring to the conversation is invaluable as their knowledge is community and not marred by “paid positions’ but driven by “life”.
The group has continued to build on its Terms of Reference since commencing in 2017, being guided by the needs and partnerships across community and with reference to the broader strategic direction and plans of the Department.

The Terms of Reference for the Early Indigenous Response Collective include:
Vision

Our vision is to reduce the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the tertiary Child Protection system through supporting a community of practice that values cultural integrity and acuity in all assessments with families coming into the Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre.
The purpose of the collective is to:

- No or limited Department intervention or Interaction with Family at every point possible
- Reduce over-representation;
- Support timely connection and engagement of services to families by the right people at the right time;
- Support the timely commencement and completion of assessments with families;
- Supporting a practice of safety and support network planning with families that is informed by the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and community members;
- True participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across government and non-government organisations in responding to a family in need when a new notification is reported to Maroochydore Child Safety Service Centre;
- Building a shared understanding of practice frameworks across the Child Protection sector for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

The shared values of the collective are:

- Upholding the five core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, including: Prevention; Partnership; Placement; Participation, and; Connection;
- Understanding the best interests of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child can only be properly determined with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Appreciating that responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children sits with more than one person or entity in community;
- Understanding that early intervention is critical to redirecting the lived experience of welfare intervention and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for their children and ensure they thrive.
We will work together by:

• Acknowledging that different ideas are okay
• Committing to purpose and attendance
• Supporting a safe space that promotes questions and cultural learnings
• Being respectful
• Being generous with our airspace
• Being supportive and strengths-based
• Reviewing our group agreements regularly, especially when new members join the group
• Communicating openly, honestly, professionally, appropriately and allowing robust conversation to be had
• Functioning according to our terms of reference
• Articulating a shared practice framework, in particular, the upholding of the five core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – Prevention; Partnership; Placement; Participation, and; Connection.
Meetings

The meetings are facilitated by The Senior Practitioner / Cultural Practice Advisor (or designated proxy). We commit to:

• Meeting face-to-face fortnightly for 1.5 hrs or as needed
• Being motivated and energetic in our attendance and in our participation during meetings
• Regularly reviewing our performance
• Sending apologies, in advance, to the facilitator for non-attendance
• Contributing to creating agenda items and discussion themes for meetings
• Meetings are directed by the membership
• Follow-up actions
We agree to the following:

• We value and encourage different perspectives as we know that this adds depth to our decision-making

• We will make decisions where we have authority to do so or make recommendations to the relevant person or persons

• Recommendations to be enacted the way they were recommended not interpreted

• Where we can, we will seek consensus on decision-making and recommendations

• When we are unable to reach consensus, we will respect and record the differing views held at the meeting.
Reporting, Escalation and Review

When we are worried about a risk or issue, we will agree to do one or all of the following:
- Explore the issue further
- Reconvene and review the matter following an agreed set of actions to explore further
- Raise with our respective supervisors, teams, leadership team or regional group as necessary.
- Seek to call an urgent collective if members feel the need to. (example)

We will regularly review our team performance, our Terms of Reference and our articulated practice framework (next review August 2019).
Our Journey

Consultation & Group Formation

Commence Referrals

Commence Group

Review working agreement

Review systems

Establish working agreements

Strengthen administrative, support to group

Strengthen efficacy measurement capability

Development of group documents

April 2017

June 2017

October 2017

March 2018

May 2018

Looking ahead

Continue to review & strengthen our model

Sharing our learnings

Maroochydore CSSC Early Indigenous Response Collective May 2018
WHAT WE HAVE SEEN SO FAR IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE COLLECTIVE WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

- Child Protection Orders: 14%
- In Home Interventions (IPAs): 67%
Why the collective has worked well so far

- Good outcomes for families
- Shared learnings of Department process
- Down Grades
- Service Centre investment
- Sighting of children
- Co respondent
- Best interest for the Family and child First and foremost
- Scaling 0-10
- Challenging staff standards and Ideals
- Creating the space for change

- Timing for the collective conversation
- Recommendations
- Urgent panels
- IA team Leader
- Drivers
- Admin support
- Panel Commitment
- Action follow-up
- Driven by the collective
- Power balance
- Staying to fact not interpretations
- Someone keeping group true to intent
Ohhh yeah we won an award!!!!
QUESTIONS?

Make sure you ask me about a future collective and a collaboration
WHERE ARE WE NOW 3 YEARS ON BECAUSE OF AUTHENTIC CULTURAL PRACTICE?

- Child Protection Orders:
  - Jan-17: 63%
  - May-18: 73%
  - Status: Still trying to gather but is reducing

- In Home Interventions (IPAs):
  - Jan-17: 14%
  - May-18: 14%