



**Submission from the
Koorie Youth Council to
the Royal Commission
into Family Violence**

June 2015

Table of Contents

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE	2
ABOUT THE KOORIE YOUTH COUNCIL	3
AN EXAMINATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE MUST BE CULTURALLY INFORMED	3
PREVALENCE AND UNDER-REPORTING OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE KOORIE COMMUNITY	5
UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS BEHIND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN KOORIE COMMUNITY	6
WHY THE COMMISSION NEEDS A STRONG FOCUS ON KOORIE YOUNG PEOPLE	7
CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE FOR KOORIE YOUNG PEOPLE	9
THE NEED FOR MORE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES FOR KOORIE YOUNG PEOPLE	12
SIGNIFICANT GAPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT RESEARCH OR PROGRAMS	13
A KEY EARLY INTERVENTION OPPORTUNITY	14
SUPPORTING KOORIE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE	15
RECOMMENDATIONS	18

A note about language

Koorie

The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) acknowledges that Victoria is home to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from many different and diverse traditional areas and language groups. Koorie (also spelt Koori) is a term 'used by contemporary Aboriginal people and communities of Victoria and Southern New South Wales to identify and differentiate themselves from Aboriginal groups from other parts of Australia.'ⁱ

KYC were established as the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council in 2003. In 2012 we changed our name to The Koorie Youth Council to encourage all young Koories to feel ownership of the organisation. In keeping with this, we have chosen to use the term Koorie in our submission. We use 'Koorie' as an inclusive word, referring to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait person from Victoria or living in Victoria.

Young people

The term 'young people' is used in this submission to refer to people aged between 12 and 25 years. This is in keeping with the accepted definition of young people utilized by the youth sector in Victoria and as such, also reflects the scope of the KYC. It should be noted too that understandings of the development and role of young people within the community are culturally influenced - meaning that assumptions about 'young people' based on western cultural frameworks can lead to inappropriate assumptions and assessments of young people's experiences and needs when applied without an awareness of cultural difference. This is discussed in more detail on page four of the submission.

ACCOs and Aboriginal Organisations and Services

ACCOs (Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations) play a key role in the delivery of services, research and policy advocacy for Koories in Victoria. Where we have made reference broadly to Aboriginal Organisations and Services, we are being inclusive of ACCOs and other types of services delivered by and/or for Koorie people (for example through Departmentally funded programs and services).

About the Koorie Youth Council

The Koorie Youth Council (KYC) provides a voice for Koorie young people to influence Government decisions, an opportunity to express themselves – and an opportunity to get together and have fun. The KYC is funded by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and supported by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the Korin Gamadji Institute. The KYC is membership based and currently has a network of over 300 young people from across the state. KYC members must be Koorie young people aged between 12 and 25 living in Victoria. Further information about the KYC can be found at the KYC website at www.koorieyouth.org.au

The Koorie Youth Council welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Royal Commission on Family Violence.

The KYC does not delivery family violence or related services, and points the Commission to the expertise of those Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations that have particular expertise in this area, such as the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

Instead, the KYC provides an advocacy spotlight on the views and needs of Koorie young people. As such, the KYC will take the opportunity in making this submission to highlight the critical importance of the Royal Commission placing a strong focus on the experiences and needs of Koorie young people in its process of gathering evidence, deliberations and findings. The KYC hopes that the Commission will:

- ensure that the Inquiry hearings process includes the direct voices of Koorie young people and/or the voices of those that support them in the community and service sector,
- make recommendations to ensure an ongoing focus on young people in family violence prevention and in strengthening the wellbeing of Koorie children and young people who have experienced family violence.

An examination of family violence must be culturally informed

It is essential that the Royal Commission into Family Violence is informed by and appreciates the cultural dimensions to the notions of 'family', 'community' and 'youth' when considering the issue of family violence in relation to Koorie people. In 2012, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Take Two - Berry Street and LaTrobe University co-authored the report *'Not one size fits all' Understanding the social & emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children*. The report 'presents the findings of an exploratory study which aimed to find or develop culturally specific, holistic and useful assessment approaches to more accurately and sensitively describe the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children.'ⁱⁱ Authors of

the report describe the critical importance of ensuring service practice frameworks are culturally appropriate:

'For too long Aboriginal children have been assessed using measures and assessment approaches which do not take into account their culture, beliefs, connection to community and place, spirituality and their individual experiences. Furthermore the assessment of an individual's social and emotional status independent of the family and community is an alien concept to Aboriginal people as well as being ecologically uninformed.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Research, program development, prevention strategies and service implementation and evaluation practices must be culturally informed to be relevant and effective in reducing family violence within Koorie community. Furthermore, when practice is not culturally informed or competent, it can do harm to individuals, families and communities.

The *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework* contains a definition of family violence as determined by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce.^{iv} As is explained in the Framework:

It is important to understand and acknowledge the definitions of family violence and primary prevention agreed upon by the Aboriginal community.... Aboriginal definitions of the nature and forms of family violence are broader and more encompassing than those used in the mainstream.^v

The Taskforce defines family violence as:

'an issue focused around a wide range of physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that occur within families, intimate relationships, extended families, kinship networks and communities. It extends to one-on-one fighting, abuse of Indigenous community workers as well as self-harm, injury and suicide.'^{vi}

The KYC recommends that the Commission acknowledge this definition within its findings.

The role of children and young people within family and community is also culturally informed and can be a point of cultural difference. In considering reasons why there is limited research that focuses on Aboriginal children, the authors of *Not one size fits all* observe that:

Another factor in the dearth of literature may be that Aboriginal children are often not distinguished from adults within the community itself....

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service acknowledge the role that Koori kids play in the lives of their families in their 2000 report entitled *'The strengths of Young Kooris'* as cited by the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2006, p.32). This role may differ from non-Aboriginal children. *"In Koori communities that I know of, kids play a big part in adult life. Kids and adults are not separated."* Daly and Smith (2003, p.14) conclude that Indigenous children are looked upon as *'independent operators; they may move alone or as part of a family group to other households within their extended family network'.^{vii}*

While the role of children and young people within Koorie community may not always reflect the clear delineation between 'adolescents' and 'adults' that is accepted in mainstream western cultural frameworks, this does not mean that the needs of children and young people should not be a strong focus in strategies and services aimed at reducing family violence and supporting those who have experienced it. It means that those strategies and service responses must be culturally relevant and respect the role that young people have within their families and communities.

Prevalence and under-reporting of family violence in the Koorie community

The widespread prevalence, significant implications and substantial costs of family violence are detailed in the *Royal Commission into Family Violence Issues Paper*.^{viii} The Commission acknowledges the difficulty in collecting accurate data given the fact that much violence remains hidden in the community despite significant increases in reporting.^{ix}

Koorie people experience family violence at a higher rate. Data recently presented to the Aboriginal Justice Forum^x (drawn from the Victoria Police LEAP database to August 2014) indicates that 'there has been a significant increase in family incident reporting, intervention order and family violence offending over the past several years in families where Aboriginality is identified.'^{xi} The data reveals that the number of Aboriginal victims of family violence related assault 'has increased from 199 in the 2007/08 reporting period to 694 in the 2013/14 reporting period, an increase of 248 per cent over seven years.'^{xii}

Like broad based community data on family violence, the data relating to family violence within the Koorie Community must also be read with caution as

underreporting is potentially even more common than in the community generally. This is acknowledged in the Justice Forum report:

'there is a high incidence of under-reporting of family violence amongst the Aboriginal community. The reasons for under-reporting are varied but are believed to include fear of reprisal from the perpetrator or wider family, need for protection of self or family from further victimization and a lack of understanding about the criminal justice system.'^{xiii}

The Koorie Youth Council also asserts that in many cases under-reporting may also be driven by deep seated mistrust of police and welfare agencies, based on experiences of culturally insensitive and inappropriate interventions, racism, and abuse as illustrated by inquiries into the 'Stolen Generations' and deaths in custody.^{xiv}

Understanding the factors behind family violence in Koorie community

In their final report to the Victorian Government in 2003, the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce explained that:

From an Indigenous perspective, the causes of family violence stem from the history and impacts of white settlement and the structural violence of race relations since then. These factors include:

- Dispossession of land, traditional culture;
- Loss of traditional language;
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal lore;
- Racism and vilification;
- Economic exclusion and entrenched poverty;
- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- The effects of institutionalism and child removal policies;
- Inherited grief and trauma; and
- Loss of traditional Aboriginal male and female roles and status.

All of these factors are seen as contributing to high levels of distress within Indigenous communities, which is often demonstrated through destructive behaviours such as substance abuse, self harm and violence against family and others.^{xv}

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, in their 1997 National Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their Families, highlighted the profound and ongoing effects of separation on

individuals, families and communities, including increasing vulnerability to family violence:

There is also a general recognition that the underlying causes of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in welfare systems include the inter-generational effects of previous separations from family and culture, poor socio-economic status and systemic racism in the broader society. These causes combine to produce cultural differences between welfare departments and Indigenous communities, substance abuse, violence, poor nutrition, alienation from social institutions including the education system, family services and the criminal justice system, limited and poor housing options and a loss of hope, particularly among younger people.^{xvi}

It is essential that these historic and societal factors be acknowledged by the Royal Commission into Family Violence as key underlying causes impacting on the prevalence of family violence in Koorie Communities.

Why the Commission needs a strong focus on Koorie young people

It is critically important that the Commission has a strong focus on the experiences and needs of young people in both its processes of gathering information and evidence and its deliberations and recommendations. As the Commission is aware, young people experience family violence either as the direct target of that violence or through the abuse of living in a household in which violence is present. At times, young people are perpetrators of family violence.

Young people need to be targeted in prevention strategies to reduce the incidence of family violence. They need to be able to access 'youth friendly'/developmentally appropriate and accessible information about family violence and how to get support if they are experiencing family violence. When young people are experiencing family violence, the support services that they come into contact with (either as individuals or accompanying a parent) need to be well equipped to engage them in ways that are age-appropriate and address their specific needs. Any strategies, services or other responses to family violence, need to respect young people - as both holders of rights and as actively engaged in the development of solutions or mapping of pathways that impact upon them.

In order to achieve these objectives for Koorie young people, programs and services must be provided in a culturally appropriate way. Frameworks, strategies and services need to recognise the role of Koorie young people in their families, communities. It is not realistic to expect youth services that are not

developed from a culturally informed framework to necessarily be accessible to and meet the needs of Koorie young people. For these reasons, it is imperative that models of support that are aimed at young people be developed by (or in partnership with) the Koorie community.

A strong focus on young people, with a particular focus on Koorie young people, in any examination of family violence and in strategies to reduce the incidence and harms of family violence is essential for the following reasons:

1. Exposure to family violence can have significant and ongoing consequences for young people, potentially resulting in:
 - a. a range of emotional, behavioural, health and mental health problems: the trauma and abuse of family violence can result in potentially ongoing consequences if appropriate support is not accessed, including challenges in forming healthy relationships and a vulnerability to intergenerational violence.^{xvii}
 - b. youth homelessness: a recent study engaging 298 young people experiencing homelessness in Australia found that '56% had to leave home because of violence between parents or guardians on at least one occasion. Of those who ran away from home because of violence between parents/carers, the median age of their first experience leaving home was only 10.'^{xviii} Koorie young people are over-represented in the population of children and young people experiencing homelessness.^{xix}
 - c. placement in out-of-home care: family violence and drug and alcohol abuse have recently been identified as the primary factors behind for the placement of Koorie young people in the out-of-home care system. Young people who have been in out-of-home care are also over-represented in the justice system and are commonly disengaged from education.^{xx}
2. Currently there is insufficient resourcing, expertise or capacity within programs or services to meet the needs of young people experiencing family violence (including universal services such as schools, generalist services such as youth services and crisis/tertiary services such as family violence and homelessness services). There is a shortage too of services that are culturally competent and able to offer Koorie young people and their families a culturally appropriate service response.
3. While there is a growing body of research detailing the impacts of family violence on children and young people and on the development of effective prevention, early intervention and tertiary support services, there are still significant gaps in the development of research that is culturally sensitive or that engages Koorie community, services or young people directly.
4. Responding effectively to the needs of young people provides a key early intervention opportunity in reducing the impact and incidence of family violence within the community. This is all the more significant for the

Koorie community given the significantly higher numbers of children and young people as a percentage of the population - 55 per cent, are under 25 years compared to 32 per cent of non-Koorie Victorians and more than one in three Koorie Victorians are under 15 years of age.^{xxi}

Each of these key issues is discussed in more detail below.

Consequences of exposure to family violence for Koorie young people

While the impact of family violence is widely felt within the community, it is linked to a range of specific, and often detrimental, outcomes for children and young people. These outcomes are explained in a growing body of research, however it is often the case that this research does not necessarily engage Koorie young people directly or involve culturally influenced research methods or frameworks. This can mean that the experiences and needs of Koorie young people can be overlooked, or at times misinterpreted. Bearing this in mind, research points to a range of physical, social and emotional impacts of family violence on children and young people. The submission from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to the Commission provides a useful summary of these impacts, highlighting the ways in which living with family violence can:

- elevate a young person's own risk of being physically harmed
- lead to trauma, anxiety, depression and other behavioural and mental health problems^{xxii}
- expose children and young people to prolonged fear and heightened stress, leading to a range of poor physical and health outcomes
- disrupt their schooling, potentially triggering flow-on effects of educational disengagement or poor educational outcomes and at times causing children to be disconnected from friends and the stability of a familiar educational environment
- feel responsible for the violence, particularly in cases where child custody has been a focus of conflict
- be impacted upon by the decreased capacity of parents (usually mothers) who have themselves been traumatised
- experience higher than average alcohol and drug consumption later in life.^{xxiii}

If family violence leads to a Koorie child or young person needing to leave their family, sometimes resulting in them being placed in statutory care, this can have a significant effect on their cultural identity and wellbeing. If that placement is not with kin or appropriately within the Koorie community, a child or young persons connection to family, land and culture can be adversely affected or undermined.

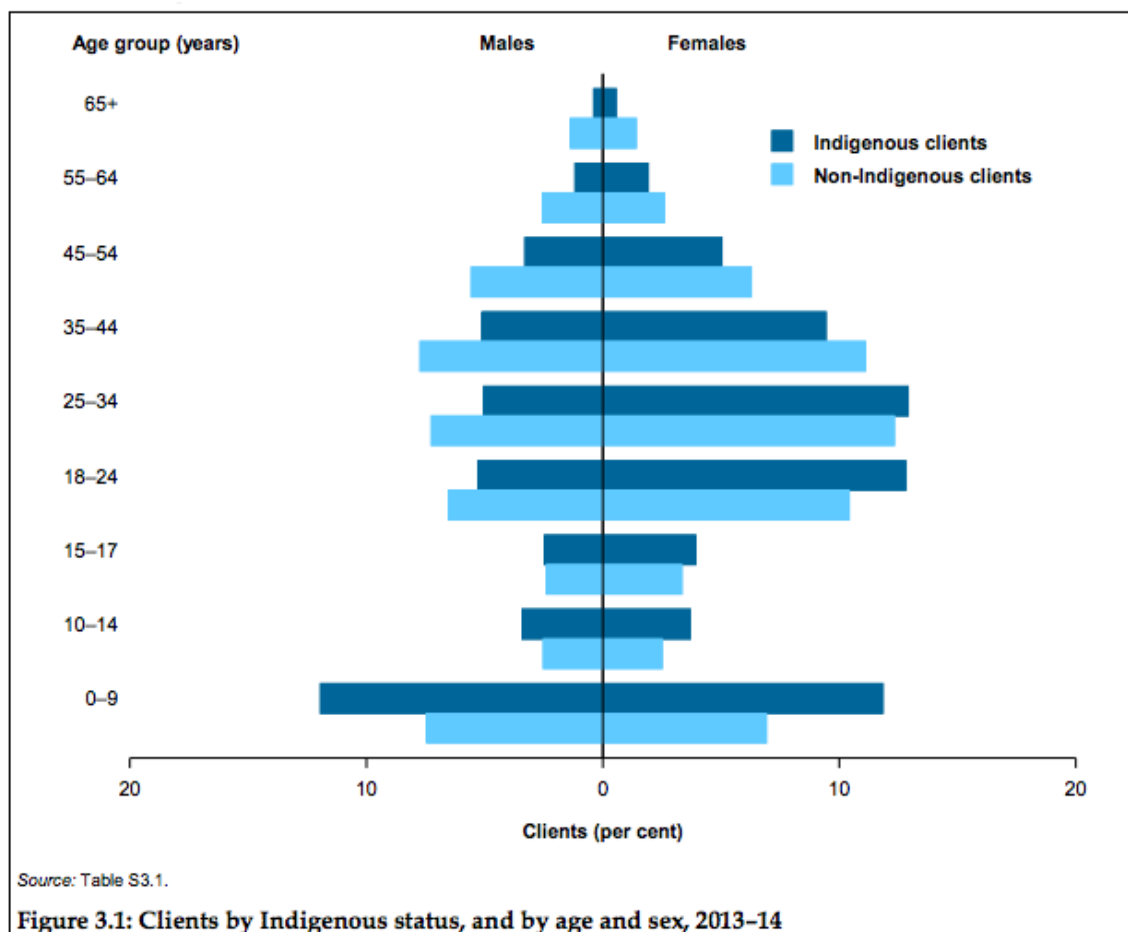
Family violence, youth homelessness and the over-representation of Koorie young people in specialist homelessness services

Alongside these impacts, family violence is a significant contributing factor to youth homelessness (both as individuals experiencing homelessness or in situations where young people accompany a parent). In an analysis of data relating to the provision of specialist homelessness services over the 2013-14 period conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, domestic and family violence or relationship/family breakdown was identified as a reason for seeking assistance for 53 per cent of clients.^{xxiv}

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people are over-represented in the specialist homelessness service client base. The same report reveals that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3% of the Australian population:

Indigenous people represented 23% of those accessing specialist homelessness services in 2013–14: an estimated 58,420 clients. This represents an increase of 6% of clients compared with the previous year.^{xxv}

Those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing specialist homelessness services are more likely to be younger and female – 24 per cent were children aged 0-9 years, and a greater percentage of clients were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in all age categories up to the age of 24 years, as the following table from the AIHW illustrates.



(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW p.26)

In terms of housing, the data also reveals significantly different housing outcomes from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients compared to non-Indigenous clients of specialist homelessness services:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients were more likely to have been living in public or community housing when they sought support (29%) – non-Indigenous clients were more likely to have been living in private or other housing (43%).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients were most commonly in public or community housing at the end of their support period (36%), or in public tenure (24%) – non-Indigenous clients were more likely to be in private rental (46%).

As such, housing outcomes achieved for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander clients of these services are less stable than that achieved for non-Indigenous service users, indicating a potentially higher risk of future vulnerability to homelessness.

Family violence and the over-representation of Koorie young people in out-of-home care

Koorie children and young people are significantly over-represented in out of home care. Disturbingly, the numbers of Koorie children and young people in care has risen dramatically in recent times. In February of this year, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Andrew Jackomos PSM, wrote an open letter highlighting the starkly higher figures released in the *2015 Report on Government Services*. He wrote:

The 2015 Report on Government Services notes that the number of Aboriginal babies and children in Victoria being placed into statutory care rose by 42 per cent in just the 12 months to 30 June 2014.

This was an increase of 386 children; rising from 922 to 1308 children at 30 June 2014. This represents a rate of 62.7 per 1000 compared to 5.1 per 1000 for all Victorian children. We already know that the rate is much higher in many of the regional areas across the state for child removals while other areas experience lower levels of removal.^{xxvi}

The Commissioner referred to his own examination of the circumstances of Koorie children and young people in care (a process named *Taskforce 1000*), to highlight the direct relationship between family violence and the placement of children and young people into statutory care:

From the 250 children we have considered as part of Taskforce 1000 we know that male perpetrated family violence and alcohol and drug abuse are present in over ninety per cent of families where children have been removed.^{xxvii}

The Commissioner goes on to draw the link between out-of-home care and poor educational attainment and contact with the justice system:

Children with out of home care experiences or currently in care make up a significant number of children in youth justice. These children are commonly disengaged from education and many go on to have contact with the criminal justice system and later incarceration.^{xxviii}

Also of significant concern is the reality that while statutory requirements (under Victoria's 2005 Children, Youth & Families Act) are in place to protect the cultural safety of Aboriginal children in statutory care, these requirements are simply not adhered to. In 2013, a joint submission was made to the State Government, by 13 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (of which the Koorie Youth Council was one) and a number of mainstream Community Services Organisations delivering out of home care services in Victoria and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. The submission was titled, *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture* and it described the disturbingly inadequate adherence with statutory requirements:

For those Aboriginal children currently in longer term out of home care placements, recent data indicates clear non-compliance with statutory requirements. An audit completed in August 2013 of 194 Aboriginal children in out of home care and subject to cultural support planning legislative requirements found that only 15 children (eight per cent) had a completed Cultural Support Plan. The data shows growing numbers of Aboriginal children in care, Aboriginal children staying in care longer and a failure to meet basic legislative and practice requirements. In blunt terms, the current approach to the protection of Aboriginal children in Victoria is failing.^{xxix}

As the authors of *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture* warn, if this trend is allowed to continue, '(t)he costs of doing nothing will be reflected in escalating costs of health, justice and correctional services due to the known long term poor outcomes and pathways of children placed in out of home care.'^{xxx}

The need for more culturally competent services for Koorie young people

The KYC would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the submission developed by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria in response to this Inquiry. This submission provides valuable detail about some of the challenges family violence services in general face in attempting to meet the needs of young people. These include being stretched in capacity and under pressure to meet the needs of adult clients, and staff not necessarily being trained in working with children and young people.^{xxxix} Alongside these challenges are significant gaps and patchy service availability in terms of youth support services across the state. These are detailed in the joint VCOSS/YACVic 2013 report *Building the Scaffolding: Strengthening Support for Young People in Victoria*.^{xxxix}

A limited number of 'mainstream' youth services are culturally competent and well placed to meet the needs of Koorie young people who are experiencing family violence and other vulnerabilities that stem from that trauma. While there are a number of programs and services both available to, and targeting, Koorie young people that are run from Aboriginal Organisations or by mainstream services working in effective partnership with Aboriginal Organisations, clearly more services are required to meet demand.

The KYC also believes that there is an opportunity for more cross-sectorial collaboration between the youth sector and Aboriginal Organisations to share expertise and examine models of youth service delivery that are culturally appropriate and effective in meeting young people's needs. To this end, the Koorie Youth Council is working with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to create an opportunity to bring together a range of service providers who work with young people in Aboriginal Organisations or services to discuss and share information on good practice approaches. This collaborative effort could result in improved practice in the development and delivery of programs and services at all points along the prevention, early intervention, secondary and tertiary services spectrum. It also has the potential to result in more effective, respectful, mutually beneficial organisational partnerships to improve outcomes for Koorie young people, their families and communities.

Significant gaps in the development of culturally relevant research or programs

Alarming broad based research about young people in Australia identifies that 'young people are struggling to work out what healthy, respectful relationships look like.'^{xxxix} As valuable as such broad-based research exploring young people's experiences and perspectives is, mainstream research does not typically engage Koorie young people, nor is it developed within a culturally influenced/aware methodology. As was mentioned earlier, the authors of *Not one size fits all* were concerned to find very little research concerned with the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people in their own literature review:

Although the population of Aboriginal people in Victoria is relatively small, it is disproportionately higher in the

population under 25 years of age, and by any indicators of health and wellbeing, is one of the most vulnerable groups (DEECD, 2010, DHS, 2006; Dwyer, Silburn, & Wilson, 2004). Therefore it is concerning why more research is not undertaken that either focuses specifically on Aboriginal children, or at least intentionally includes them in larger studies.^{xxxiv}

They also explain the differences between mainstream research and Aboriginal ways of knowing and the value of utilizing elements of both in order to better understand Aboriginal young people's needs and provide more effective services for them:

The Aboriginal partner [within the research project] is seeking ways to develop a hybrid of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of research and analysis in order to improve its service delivery to Aboriginal children and families...

Our view is that Aboriginal ways of finding information works because they are based on cultural understanding, cultural respect, community engagement and community empowerment. Non-Aboriginal research methods have certain strengths such as statistical analysis, psychometrics and various disciplines of interpretation and conceptualization. We know, however, that these types of systems of knowledge frequently redevelop and, more often than not, are susceptible to cultural bias.^{xxxv}

Further research is required to better understand the attitudes and understandings of Koorie young people in relation to healthy, respectful relationships and Koorie young people's level of understanding around how to access support if they are experiencing family violence. In order to avoid cultural bias in research and program development it is essential that research be inclusive of Koorie young people and culturally informed.

A key early intervention opportunity

Providing young people with an understanding of family violence and a range of strategies and personal skills to ensure they do not perpetrate family violence is a key element of family violence prevention in the community. Effective implementation of family violence prevention strategies with young people can ensure family violence is not played out inter-generationally.

A significant opportunity for this exists within the Koorie community, where children and young people make up such a high percentage of the population. This is reflected in the 'Aboriginal Family Violence Consultant's Guidelines' released this month by the Victorian Government to support the implementation

of the Indigenous Family Violence Strategy. The guideline 'Consultation Protocols' call on consultants to specifically 'focus on youth':

In recognition that Aboriginal young people represent more than half of the Victorian Aboriginal population, actively seek to engage youth in consultation, seeking input and developing their leadership and other capacities, while appreciating their relationships with the Aboriginal community.^{xxxvi}

It is KYCs view that this would be a worthy recommendation for the Royal Commission to replicate in terms of ways forward in engaging Koorie young people in the development of solutions to prevent family violence.

Supporting Koorie young people who have had experiences of family violence

Much is known about 'what works' in terms of culturally appropriate service delivery and culturally informed service and program development. In considering the role of services in providing support to Koorie young people who have experiences of family violence, it is valuable to draw on some of the research, observations and guiding principles that have been developed in order to ensure the cultural safety of clients.

In 2010, the White Ribbon Foundation developed a comprehensive analysis of the effects of family violence on young people. The report details some characteristics of effective family violence programs for Aboriginal communities:

There is a consensus in the violence prevention field that interventions should be 'culturally appropriate' – sensitive to cultural diversities, responsive to the character and constitution of violence in that particular cultural context, and using culturally appropriate strategies (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Kasturirangan et al. 2004). This applies to youth-focused violence prevention as much as to any other violence prevention strategy, and is relevant in all contexts and communities in Australia. However, perhaps where its need has been most evident is in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), communities. Prevention strategies addressing intimate partner violence (or other forms of 'family violence') in Aboriginal and Islander communities are rare, and evaluated interventions are even rarer. Nevertheless, a variety of promising interventions have been

enacted (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003c). Memmott et al. (2006) provide a useful overview of evaluated interventions in Aboriginal and Islander communities. Programs to address 'family violence' in Aboriginal and Islander communities must be community-driven, based on partnerships between and among community and government agencies, and use holistic approaches to community violence.^{xxxvii}

More than 10 years ago, the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce called for a holistic approach to family healing:

From an Indigenous perspective, mainstream models appear to be premised on inequality within a spousal relationship which give rise to a service response of refuges and criminal sanctions that do not fully address the complex fundamental causes of violence in Indigenous communities. In response to the unique historical context in which Indigenous family violence occurs, Indigenous communities have called for a holistic approach to family healing.^{xxxviii}

In their submission to the 2011 Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency detailed principles for service delivery to Aboriginal children and young people. These principles were reiterated and supported by the authors of *Koorie Kids: Growing strong in their Culture*:

Underlying all the principles is the fundamental importance of self-determination and social justice for Aboriginal people, including children's need to connect to culture. These principles are:

- Aboriginal services for Aboriginal people.
- Vulnerable Aboriginal children need a service system built on social justice principles.
- Protecting Aboriginal children is everyone's responsibility.
- Protecting Aboriginal children begins with prevention.
- A culturally competent child and family welfare service system.
- A child-centred service system.
- A family focussed system.
- Vulnerable Aboriginal children need immediate responses.
- Vulnerable Aboriginal children need a strongly connected and integrated service system.
- Vulnerable Aboriginal children need therapeutic responses.

- Support evidence based practice as we are more likely to get better outcomes.^{xxxix}

KYC believes that these principles should also underpin the development and delivery of support services for Koorie young people who have experienced family violence.

Given the strong relationship between family violence and the placement of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care identified by the roll-out of *Taskforce 1000* by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, it is relevant to examine the geographic data relating to drops or rises in the number of admissions of Koorie children in out of home care around the state and the factors that may be contributing to the reduction in numbers where that is the case. *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their culture* provides a comparative analysis of data relating to admissions of Aboriginal children and young people into out of home care from 2000-2003 to 2009-2012 by DHS region. The analysis reveals notable variation across the 17 DHS areas. The most significant growth in admissions over that time were in the areas of Western Melbourne, Inner Eastern Melbourne and Brimbank Melton.^{xl}

In contrast, four DHS areas revealed significant declines in placements. As is explained in the submission:

over the last decade four Department of Human Services areas experienced declines in admissions of Aboriginal children to out of home care, (Outer Gippsland by minus 61 per cent, Mallee by minus 54 per cent, Goulburn by minus 44 per cent and North Eastern Melbourne by minus 1 per cent), all areas characterised by well-established ACCOs actively engaged in their communities.^{xli}

It is KYC's view that, given the strong correlation between family violence and the placement of children in statutory care, a more detailed examination of the factors that have influenced the decline in admissions in out of home care in these areas would be valuable. As the authors note, the presence of well-established ACCOs is a factor that has been identified as contributing to the drop in admissions. Further investigation may reveal further factors or further detail that can inform broader approaches to service planning and provision.

Recommendations

1. That the Royal Commission into Family Violence ensure a strong focus on the experiences and needs of young people, and Koorie young people specifically, within its process of gathering evidence, within the hearings process and within the final report and recommendations put forth in that report. Furthermore, that these recommendations call for a sustained policy and program focus (matched by economic investment) to ensure that the needs of young people are featured in prevention, early intervention and tertiary service responses to family violence.
2. That the Royal Commission into Family Violence recognise the definition of family violence used by the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce (as outlined on page 4 of this submission).
3. That, in their research and findings, the Royal Commission into Family Violence acknowledges the historic and societal factors contributing to the prevalence of family violence within Koorie community, as defined by the Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce (and outlined on page 6 of this submission).
4. That Koorie young people be actively engaged in culturally safe research and program development to contribute to the development of family violence prevention strategies targeting Koorie young people. This research and engagement process should follow the principles of good practice partnership with Aboriginal organisations and services and Koorie community in order to ensure the research process is culturally informed and contains opportunities for mutual capacity building for all partners.
5. That the Royal Commission into Family Violence make recommendations that echo the recommendations put forth by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Andrew Jackomos PSM, in his open letter dated 3 February 2015, namely for:
 - ‘the development of a state-wide strategic response to improving the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal babies, children and young people with child protection, youth justice and child homelessness as well as children’s trauma and mental health at its core...The strategic response should be an initiative agreed between the broad Aboriginal community and government, with governance arrangements on par with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The response at a minimum should include; principles, protocols, targets and measureable outcomes monitored through a partnership forum.’^{xlii}

6. That the Commission highlight the principles for service delivery to Aboriginal children and young people, originally developed by Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and supported by the authors of *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture* as outlined on pages 15 and 16 of this submission).
7. That the Youth and Aboriginal Services sectors be supported to work in collaboration on a range of sector development initiatives aimed at strengthening support to Koorie young people, such as:
 - a. working collaboratively to explore and strengthen culturally informed practice in working with young people and delivering services that meet their needs.
 - b. promoting and providing opportunities for the development of cultural competence in service settings for young people
 - c. supporting good practice partnerships that are mutually beneficial between youth service organisations and Aboriginal Organisations and Services.
8. That the Royal Commission either undertake, or make a recommendation to provide for, a more detailed examination of the factors that have influenced the decline in admissions (from 2000-2003 to 2009-2012) in out of home care in the Department of Human Services areas of Outer Gippsland, Mallee, Goulburn and North Eastern Melbourne. Given the established causal relationship between family violence and the placement of children and young people in out-of-home care, this may reveal important insights into effective strategies for reducing family violence.

ⁱ Koorie Heritage Trust website 'Our History'

http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/about_us/history_1 (accessed 23/5/15)

ⁱⁱ Bamblett, M., Frederico, M., Harrison, J., Jackson, A., & Lewis, P. (2012). *'Not one size fits all' Understanding the social & emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children*. Bundoora: La Trobe University. p.6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Bamblett, M., Frederico, M., Harrison, J., Jackson, A., & Lewis, P. (2012). *'Not one size fits all' Understanding the social & emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children*. Bundoora: La Trobe University. p.6.

^{iv} State of Victoria (2003) *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Final Report*, Melbourne. The Victorian Indigenous Family Violence taskforce was launched in 2002 by the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Minister for Community Services, following its inaugural meeting in October 2001. The taskforce included 'a range of key Indigenous leaders who have experience and expertise relevant to family violence related Government and community services including the Indigenous members of the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council (the ATSIC Commissioner and the two ATSIC Regional Council Chairpersons).' (p.23).

^v State of Victoria (2012) *Indigenous Family Violence Primary Prevention Framework*.

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/718439/Indigenous-family-violence-prim-preventionframework.pdf (accessed 24/05/15) p.8.

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Bamblett, M., Frederico, M., Harrison, J., Jackson, A., & Lewis, P. (2012). *op.cit.* p.31. The reports being cited in this passage include Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). (2006). *Young Aboriginal Victorians on Culture, Identity and Racism*. & Daly, A.E. & Smith, D.E. (2003). *Reproducing Exclusion or Inclusion? Implications for the Wellbeing of Indigenous Australian Children* (No. 253/2003). Canberra: The Australian National University.

^{viii} Royal Commission into Family Violence Issues Paper, released 31 March 2015.

<http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/UploadedDocs/RCFV-Issues-Paper.pdf> (accessed 23/5/15) p.4.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x This data was presented within the Aboriginal Justice Forum Agenda Paper 5 for the meeting No 41, at Chirnside Park from 23 – 24 April 2015.

^{xi} Aboriginal Justice Forum, Agenda Paper 5 How does the Justice System respond to Aboriginal Family Violence? p.2. A copy can be obtained by contacting KYC directly.

^{xii} Aboriginal Justice Forum, *op.cit.* p.6.

^{xiii} Aboriginal Justice Forum, *op.cit.* p.10. Here the authors of the report are drawing on the Department of Justice and Regulation Research Paper 'Building on what works: best practices for early intervention and prevention of family violence in Aboriginal Communities' by Amy Wignall, June 2014, p.11.

^{xiv} The term 'Stolen Generations' refers to the disproportionate and at times systematic removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and was detailed in the 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity

Commission report *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. The disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal deaths in custody was the subject of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* in 1987.

^{xv} State of Victoria (2003) *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Final Report*, Melbourne. p.11

^{xvi} Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997) *Bringing them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*. p.374.

^{xvii} Flood, M & Fergus, L. (2010) *An Assault on our Future. The impact of violence on young people and their relationships: A White Ribbon Foundation Report*. http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/Research_series/An_assault_on_our_future_FULL_Flood_Fergus_2010.pdf (accessed 29/05/15).

^{xviii} Paul Flatau, Monica Thielking, David MacKenzie, Adam Steen, (2015) *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia study*, Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology, p.8.

^{xix} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW p.24

^{xx} An open letter from Andrew Jackomos PSM, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, 3 February 2015, can be found at http://www.snaicc.org.au/uploads/nwart/files/Jackomos_letter_ROG_report_February_2015.pdf

^{xxi} ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011, as cited in State of Victoria (2014) *Garrin Garrin: A Strategy to Improve Learning and Development Outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians*. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne. p.8.

^{xxii} Flood, M & Fergus, L. (2010).op.cit. See this report for a summary of a broad range of impacts.

^{xxiii} See submission from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria to this Inquiry.

^{xxiv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW p. 14.

^{xxv} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014. Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276. Canberra: AIHW p.24.

^{xxvi} The open letter from Andrew Jackomos PSM, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, 3 February 2015, can be found at http://www.snaicc.org.au/uploads/nwart/files/Jackomos_letter_ROG_report_February_2015.pdf (accessed 28/05/15).

^{xxvii} *Ibid.*

^{xxviii} *Ibid.*

^{xxix} *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture. Five year plan for Aboriginal children in out of home care: A joint submission from Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Community Service Organisations*. Available for download from

<http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/downloads/submissions/submission-koorie-kids-growing-strong-in-their-culture-nov13.pdf> (accessed 27/05/15) p.3.

^{xxx} *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture. Five year plan for Aboriginal children in out of home care: A joint submission from Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Community Service Organisations*. p.4.

^{xxxi} See the YACVic submission to this Inquiry.

-
- xxxii Victorian Council of Social Service & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2013) *Building the Scaffolding: Strengthening Support for Young People in Victoria*. Available for download from <http://www.yacvic.org.au/news/415-building-the-scaffolding-strengthening-support-for-young-people-in-victoria> (accessed 27/05/15)
- xxxiii Hall & Partners|OpenMind (2015), *The Line campaign: Summary of research findings. Prepared for OurWatch*. p.4.
- xxxiv Bamblett, M., Frederico, M., Harrison, J., Jackson, A., & Lewis, P. (2012). *op.cit.* p.31.
- xxxv Bamblett, M., Frederico, M., Harrison, J., Jackson, A., & Lewis, P. (2012). *op.cit.* p.10
- xxxvi State of Victoria, *Aboriginal Family Violence Consultants' Guidelines*, May 2015. p.8. Available for download from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/911319/Aboriginal-Family-Violence-Consultants-Guidelines.pdf (accessed 23/5/15)
- xxxvii Flood, M & Fergus, L. (2010) *op.cit.* pp.31-32.
- xxxviii State of Victoria (2003) Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce Final Report. Available for download from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/581154/vic-indigenous-family-violence-task-force-report-2003-main.pdf (accessed 25/05/15) p.11.
- xxxix *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture. op.cit.* pp.19-20.
- xl *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture. op.cit.* p.14.
- xli *Koorie Kids: Growing Strong in their Culture. op.cit.* p.15.
- xlii The open letter from Andrew Jackomos PSM, Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, 3 February 2015, can be found at http://www.snaicc.org.au/uploads/nwart/files/Jackomos_letter_ROG_report_February_2015.pdf (accessed 28/05/15).