Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

Cultural and Spiritual Identity Forum

for the Quality Assurance Framework for statutory OOHC

November 2016

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What is the Quality Assurance Framework?

The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) has been designed to collect, hold and standardise information from various sources on the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) in NSW.

The QAF will provide a central point where consistent, comprehensive and integrated information is held, and will assist frontline staff with developing individual case plans. The information will also be used to inform best practice and policy development.

The aim of the QAF is to make the experience of children who are in OOHC the best we possibly can and in doing so, focus on improving their outcomes.

FACS and the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) are trialling the QAF, with three NGOs and one FACS site taking part:

- MacKillop Family Services
- Key Assets Australia
- Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation Inc.
- Mid North Coast FACS District
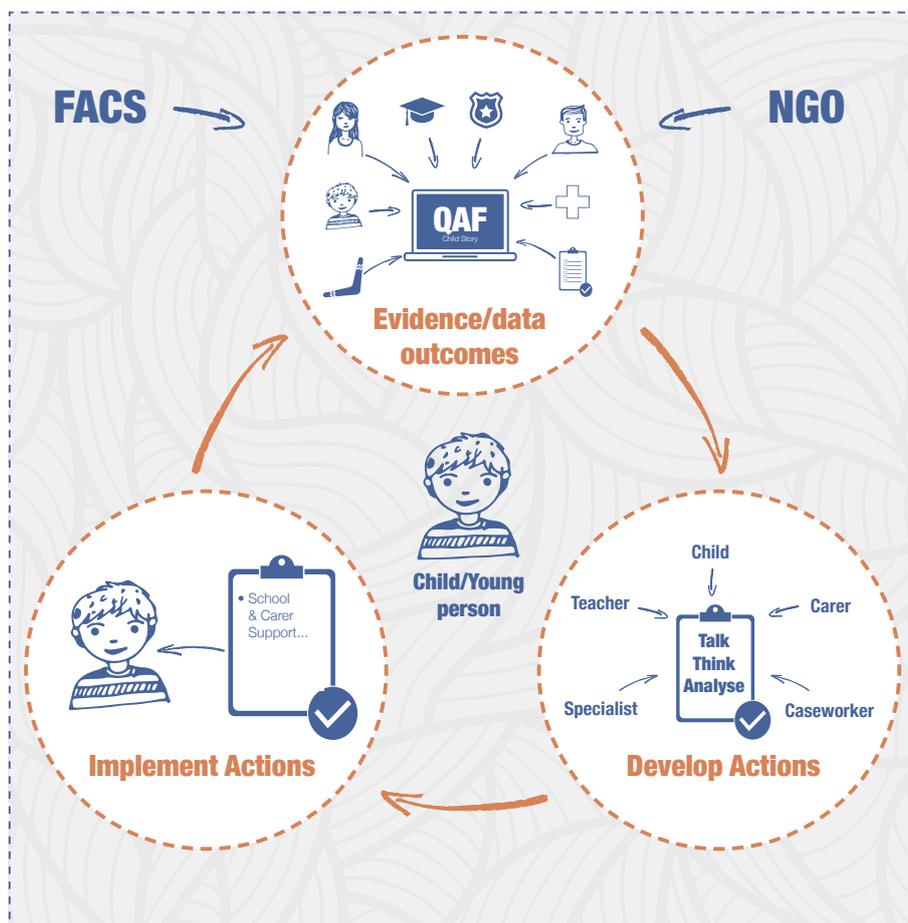
Cultural and Spiritual Identity

A sense of cultural and spiritual identity is important for the health and wellbeing of children in OOHC, particularly Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) children and young people. FACS has recognised how integral this connection to culture and spirituality is and has incorporated a domain focused on culture in the QAF. The first step in the design of this cultural domain is to gain an understanding of what culture and spirituality mean to CALD people. A forum was held to ask the question: *What does cultural and spirituality identity mean to you?,* and this report is a summary of the forum.

Key Findings

A diverse group of cultures was represented at the forum, with participants drawing out what they believe to be the key elements that sit behind culture. A key finding that came out of the day was that culture is not the colour of your skin or where you live.

The CALD participant's spoke of:

- there being no blanket rule for what culture and spirituality is in Australia

- the importance of a child in OOHC learning about their culture and having a sense of belonging

- maintaining familiarity with culture and connection to their community

Many forum participants' background comprised of parents from different cultures and grandparents again with different cultural backgrounds. This is common in Australia and a key finding from the forum was the importance of needing to learn about our own culture and other cultures so that as a society, we have a greater cross cultural understanding.

"*Culture is very deep; it's like an iceberg, with most of it underneath hidden from view.*"

What we did

As part of the QAF design process, a forum was held on 22 November 2016 comprising key stakeholders, service providers and groups with significant different cultural backgrounds. A panel of specialist services, community leaders and academics discussed key aspects of culture before asking participants: *What does cultural and spiritual identity means to you?* and how this might translate for children in statutory OOHC.

"I never thought we would be here today, acknowledging culture for children in OOHC – congratulations!"

Session Statistics

44 Attendees

12 Males
32 Females
23 NGO attendees
11 Community Members
10 FACS Staff

Participants identified with one or more of the following counties/heritages and/or spiritual groups: Scottish, English, Wales, Ireland, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, China, France, Vietnam, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Italy, Poland, Lithuania, Iran, Kurdish, Iraq, Philippines, Australia, Aboriginal, Bolivia, India, Uruguay, Uganda, Tibet, Turkey, New Zealand, Chili, Yugoslavia, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Mother Earth, Albanian, Buddhist, Catholic, Christian, Muslim, Palestinian Prophets, Presbyterian.

Panel Summary

Dr John Jegasothy-Tamil Organisation NSW

Rev. Dr Jegasothy comes from Sri Lanka from a Batticaloa town in the east. He did his training to be a Methodist minister in a trilingual seminary and later ministered in all three languages in Colombo to a multicultural people from different congregation both in Sri Lanka and Australia.

Dr Omid Tofighian-Sydney University

When trying to understand cultural and spiritual identities it is important to consider how "identity is interconnected with cultural history, colonisation and other forms of injustice, and societal systems. Interpreting identity also requires considering race, gender, popular culture and displacement. Incorporating intersecting discourses into academic debate gives us insight into lived experiences and helps explain how different factors impact our identities."

Maha Abdo-United Muslim Women Association Inc

Maha has learnt that talking from the heart is as important as "faith is the soul of humanity". This was demonstrated to her by her father who established the Lebanese Muslim Association, then the first mosque in Lakemba, which was made possible by the support of many groups from various faiths and cultures.

Mohamed Dukuly – NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS)

"The core of identity is to know yourself". The key principles of wellbeing are a sense of belonging, sense of hope, sense of worth and being proud of your identity. This helps you find goodness in all humankind.

Mira Mitrovic – Multicultural Support Project Coordinator, Community Migrant Resource Centre

I have observed that in most cultures and in the majority of families children are born out of love and with an intention to raise them in the best possible way. The way we do this, however, may differ. Whilst some cultures are affectionate and playful with their children, in other cultures adults are there to basically provide kids with a roof over their head, food on the table, clothing and medical care. In OOHC it is critical that we learn, recognise and support both similarities and differences in order to help children maintain their culture. Whilst we can never replace a parent, it is important to listen to, understand and assist children in meeting their cultural needs and maintaining their culture.

Panel Discussion

The panel was asked a series of questions around the importance of culture and spirituality for children in OOHC. It was then opened to the floor for comment, this is what they said...

> "If a child or young person is placed with the wrong family in OOHC it can lead them to feel a loss of identity. This is not due to a lack of care; it's a lack of understanding and/or recognition of the child's needs. It's not enough to pay a tokenistic approach to culture and spirituality such as celebrating NAIDOC week or Ramadan."

" Children need to hold onto something when they come into care. "

> "When carers understand the basic daily routines connected with a child's spirituality and culture, for example prayer times, story telling, important people, heroes, books etc. it helps foster a sense of belonging. The simple things can make a big difference such as a familiar smell, a doll, blanket or familiar food."

Things we find as innocuous can have a profound effect on a child. This is particularly important when interacting with children suffering from trauma. We need to understand different experiences and cultural differences.

" A refugee child who was told to 'stand in line' whilst at school, became highly distressed and later told the teacher that the last time he was told this, his father and uncle were shot dead. "

The professional approach to OOHC is problematic. Children and young people are labelled as being in OOHC, and constantly reminded of this through case conferences, client files and leaving care plans. This is what leads to a child being stigmatised. Children and young people don't want to be different at school, they don't want to be 'a case'.

" Any time we spend with children, we need to invest that time wisely. "

FACS introducing Family Group Conferences is a key methodology to how FACS can recognise, promote and maintain cultural and spiritual identity of a child or young person.

Whilst OOHC cannot replace a child's family, it can still provide important cultural information. This is particularly pertinent to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds where people where the wider community has an important role in the child's life.

> "When my name was changed, I lost my identity, people didn't think I was Aboriginal not Lebanese."

We should remember that culturally appropriate placements should be a priority when looking for longer-term care, and that contact with parents should be maintained where possible.
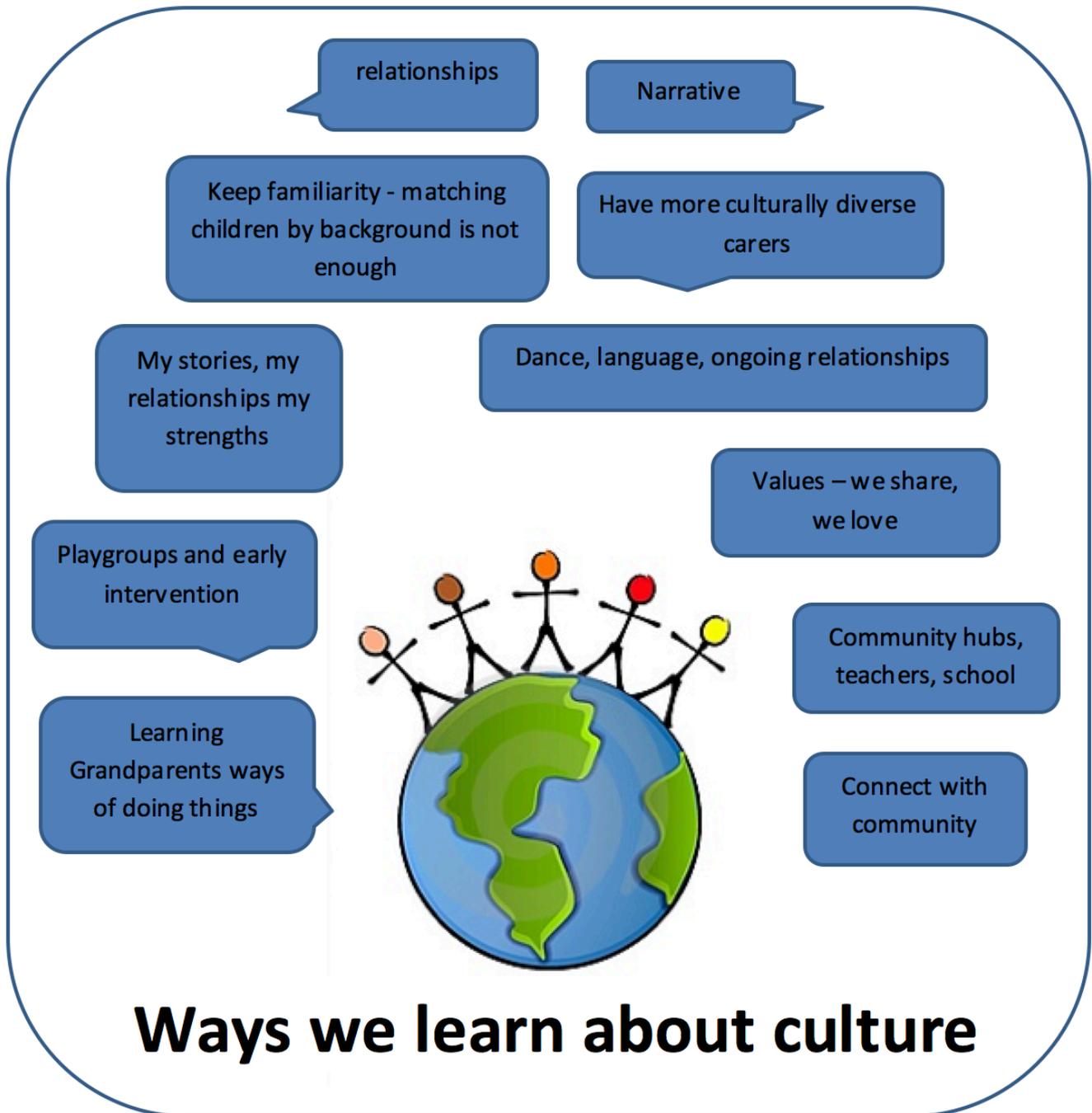

" Belonging, worth and hope are key aspects in measuring the impact of cultural and spiritual identity. "

> "It is important to talk with, and listen to a child to find out their goals, and where they come from. Then it is possible to journey with the child and support their growth."

Workshop activities

Findings of 'what defines culture in OOHC and how do we measure these?'

	What defines culture in OOHC?	**How do we measure this?**
Recognition	• Normalising difference – Its ok to be different • Recognising the impact of colonialism. Not compounding oppression through imposing the majority cultural norms	✓ Cultural Care Plans ✓ Age appropriate ✓ Is the child or young person able to describe their culture?
Action	• Understanding and respecting a child or young person's culture and spirituality • Cultural Awareness training for Carers • Ensuring a child or young person's knows their stories and history • Using culturally significant stories, music, art, photos • Cultural development and cultural maintenance • Ensuring a child or young person's participates in daily cultural activities	✓ Using base line data at key points e.g. beginning middle and end of care ✓ Measuring whether daily routines are being facilitated ✓ Measuring a child's knowledge of their culture
Belonging	• Connecting a child or young person with their community • Promoting Foster Care to attract more CALD Carers • Mentoring camps and prioritising restoration plans • Family Group Conferences • Cultural carers and staff • Ensuring children and young people have cultural mentors	✓ Resentment – negative indicators are equally important to measure ✓ Measuring the occurrence of Family Group Conferences
Child Centred	• Listening to and talking '*with*' a child or young person • Hearing the voice of the child • Good communication skills • Talking and caring • Positive relationships with carers • Early intervention and education for parents	✓ Using self reports from children and young people and carers ✓ Using self reports based on conversation and narrative ✓ Completing annual surveys with children, young people and carers in community language ✓ Measuring whether the child's voice is central to the care plan ✓ Ensuring an individualised approach – the same measurements will not fit each child
Connection	• Placing a child with kin and ensuring meaningful contact with parents/family • Connection with birth family • Connection to community	✓ Measuring the frequency and quality of contact with significant people ✓ Measuring the frequency and quality of contact with the community ✓ Using measurements which recognise identity changes at different life stages
Choice	• Empowering children and young people and encouraging them to explore and find their own identity and make up their mind what they want (even if this is not their culture of origin)	✓ Using self-reported cultural background ✓ Ensuring indicators are able to measure gradual process ✓ Using measures which balance a child's voice and rights and evidence regarding safety and permanency

relationships

Narrative

Keep familiarity - matching children by background is not enough

Have more culturally diverse carers

My stories, my relationships my strengths

Dance, language, ongoing relationships

Values – we share, we love

Playgroups and early intervention

Community hubs, teachers, school

Learning Grandparents ways of doing things

Connect with community

Ways we learn about culture

Outcomes

We surveyed participants following the forum and below is their feedback:

- 34 per cent said the forum exceeded their expectations

- 66 per cent said it met their expectations

We asked participants what elements of culture and spirituality would be the most beneficial for children in OOHC. Overall the feedback was around:

- 'maintaining their birth family language'

- 'learning about their culture', 'having a sense of belonging'

- participating in and practicing 'cultural activities', 'ceremony', 'faith', 'values', 'customs', 'dress' and 'food'.

A significant level of feedback relayed was the need for "cultural mentors to be involved in a child and young person's life in order to maintain cultural connections."

One participant said it was important that "children have a real experience – not just attending a function once a year."

Another said "connecting with people and family in the culture" and "exposure to cultural events, programs and workshops" was important to cultural and spiritual identity.

The feedback clearly shows that to ensure cultural elements of the child's OOHC experience are being provided to the child or young person, we need to first ask the child, family/kin, carers and caseworkers.

What will we do next?

The valuable information and insights provided by the forum participants have been used to inform the trial of the QAF. We are continuing the design stage by working with a small group of CALD stakeholder representatives in a Cultural and Spiritual Identity Task Team.

The Task Team is made up of representatives from the Migrant Resource Centre, Settlement Services International, FACS Policy and Multicultural Service Unit and members of the FACS QAF team.

The Task team had its first meeting in March 2017 and is reviewing a first draft of the domain. Task Team members will provide feedback on the draft at the second meeting in April 2017.

Thank you

Thank you to all forum participants who shared their experiences and insights with us. We feel very privileged to talk with such a dynamic and interesting group of people.

Thanks to Danielle Annells, Principal Consultant, Collaboration Whisperer, who facilitated the day.

Thank you to the panel: Dr John Jegasothy who travelled back from Melbourne to be with us, Dr Omid Tofighian, Maha Abdo, Mohammed Dukuly and Mira Mitrovic.

And thank you to all those who travelled to be with us that day. Your support has facilitated better connections, and this has led to great discussions.

Would you like to know more?

If you were a forum participant and would like to have a chat about the report, you can email us at QAF@facs.nsw.gov.au

If you would like to know more about the QAF, visit the FACS website: www.facs.nsw.gov.au or email QAF@facs.nsw.gov.au