



Family &
Community
Services

Family and Community Services Aboriginal strategy 2013-2015

Better Outcomes for Aboriginal People and Communities



Saretta Fielding

Born in Sydney, Saretta Fielding, descends from the Wanaruah people of the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. She has enjoyed the benefit of growing up within a large and close-knit extended family. Much of her work is influenced by family connection and relationships. Saretta is a contemporary artist and always endeavours to communicate within her artwork a connection to spirit, community, nature and country.

Artwork Story

Saretta's artwork (untitled) tells her story of Family and Community Services (FACS) coming together and working alongside with Aboriginal people and communities.

The 15 dots found within the border circle represent 15 FACS Districts. Designs within the kidney shapes symbolise people. The repetition of the motif symbolises FACS' focus on people and partnerships across the communities in which they live. The multiple symbols within these shapes represent togetherness, respectful relationships, trust and connection. The central image represents the community united in an unbroken chain. It denotes protection, strength, resilience and nurturing ever-present in Aboriginal communities. Each character puts their hands in the centre to represent a united front against Aboriginal disadvantage. Together, we can help close the gap, achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal communities through economic inclusion, increased self-esteem, lifted opportunities and the overall empowerment of Aboriginal people. This artwork also highlights the importance of acknowledging and respecting the wisdom and knowledge of Aboriginal elders and culture.

Message from the Secretary

Aboriginal people in Australia maintain the oldest surviving cultures on earth.

Arguably the greatest Australian achievement is the survival of Aboriginal people through the years of European conquest and colonisation and beyond.

The injustice and exclusion that is part of the history of modern Australia scars the present in the comparatively poor health, education, prosperity and safety of Aboriginal people.

Family and Community Services (FACS) serves some of the most vulnerable people in NSW. History and the debilitating effects of intergenerational disadvantage explain why too many of the people we serve are Aboriginal.

I want us to do all we can to help bridge the gap in opportunity and achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and support people to improve their lives through initiatives that address local community needs.

Better Outcomes for Aboriginal People and Communities Aboriginal Strategy 2013-2015 is part of the FACS wide reform agenda to improve services by making more decisions locally and getting closer to the communities we serve.

Our long term goal is to deliver services that reflect the needs of the individual, not what's usual or convenient to us or our non-government partners. We will connect activities across the department to build on the good work already underway to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people.

This strategy will help us to work with Aboriginal people as they create opportunities and shape their lives and futures.

We'll also implement a robust accountability and monitoring framework which will include a Charter of Standards for service delivery to Aboriginal people.

As part of this framework, each of our districts will develop a Cultural Inclusion Plan to identify local approaches to achieve results.

This will provide a vehicle for giving Aboriginal clients and communities a say in what services are relevant to them and how they can be improved.

I encourage you to read this document and see how you can play a part. It's up to all of us to work together to make this strategy a success.

Michael Coutts-Trotter
Secretary
NSW Department of Family and Community Services

The big picture – why we need an Aboriginal strategy to create better outcomes for Aboriginal people

FACS delivers services to some of the most disadvantaged individuals, families and communities in NSW. We aim to enable vulnerable people to participate fully in social and economic life and build stronger, more sustainable and inclusive communities.

FACS has a range of specific Aboriginal programs to address general disadvantage in Aboriginal communities. Better Outcomes provides an overarching department-wide policy on Aboriginal service responses. It doesn't replace the specialised work of Aboriginal units within FACS but connects activities across the department to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. It also positions FACS to have a strong role in influencing government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal clients.

The focus of the strategy is on ensuring that all of our services, activities and reforms ultimately improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and their communities. This becomes more pertinent as we move towards localised service delivery networks across NSW. Through localisation, the department is decentralising resources and decision-making to local areas thereby placing clients at the centre of everything we do. Devolving responsibility for innovative, people-focused solutions will be an important step in meeting this challenge. Local staff know their communities and are best placed to plan and deliver services that are person-centred and responsive to their communities.

Localisation provides for greater autonomy and integration of service delivery.

How we prepared the strategy

In 2012 we held a series of staff workshops to identify and prioritise initiatives for this strategy. From those gatherings, an informal Aboriginal Reference Group emerged, made up of senior Aboriginal staff from across the department. They identified four main themes:

1. Aboriginal community and staff engagement, influence and leadership
2. Improve Aboriginal service delivery, through a coordinated approach that is flexible to local circumstances, client focused and culturally appropriate
3. Build workforce capability and improve Aboriginal employment outcomes through developing and promoting career pathways within the department and the non-government sector
4. Ensure a strong, coordinated response to the reform priorities under the NSW Government plan, Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility and Empowerment (OCHRE), for Aboriginal affairs.

Under each theme, a number of projects and initiatives were identified as key deliverables. These themes are the foundation for this strategy.

Strategic directions

1. Encourage and support Aboriginal community and staff engagement, influence and leadership

The department values the participation of Aboriginal people in all aspects of its work. This advice and involvement helps us to make our programs and services more effective and culturally appropriate. As FACS moves towards a localised approach, engaging Aboriginal communities and staff is crucial to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people. To this end, the recognition and development of leadership skills among Aboriginal staff, communities and individuals (in the government and non-government sectors) is paramount. This strategy outlines the steps we will take to achieve our goals.

1.1 Develop an Aboriginal commitment statement for the department

A commitment statement to Aboriginal people is essential in pledging the department's support to enhance client and staff confidence in our services. Prior to our amalgamation as a department – FACS, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) led the way in 2005 with the launch of their *Aboriginal Policy Framework and Aboriginal Consultation Strategy*, which articulated the commitment to the department to improving service delivery to Aboriginal people. Community Services followed with the launch of its *Aboriginal Strategic Commitment 2006-2011* and later in the *Commitment of Service to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. In March 2010, Housing NSW launched their *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People* outlining a five-year program to improve service delivery to Aboriginal people in NSW. In 2010-11, ADHC launched its *Aboriginal Policy Statement*, which provides the foundation to strengthen services for older Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people with disability, their families and carers. We will bring these statements together to express our overall commitment to Aboriginal people in NSW.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Consolidate and reaffirm our commitment to Aboriginal people across all our activities
- ▶ A better understanding of disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal people and the special requirements of Aboriginal people
- ▶ More effective locally-connected services and a culturally-proficient environment where Aboriginality is understood and respected
- ▶ Enhance and instil Aboriginal client and staff confidence in our services.

1.2 Develop and formalise an Aboriginal Governance Model to guide the Aboriginal Strategy

The Aboriginal Strategy Reference Group, made up of senior Aboriginal staff from across FACS, helped to guide the development of this strategy. A key focus of the strategy will be to develop an ongoing Aboriginal Governance Model which includes an Aboriginal Standing Committee, Cluster Aboriginal Advisory groups and a range of Aboriginal Staff Networks. These advisory groups will provide strategic and cultural advice on how all programs for Aboriginal people and communities are designed and delivered.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Encourage, develop and promote Aboriginal staff as leaders
- ▶ Provide strategic and cultural advice on how to improve programs and services to Aboriginal people that are delivered by the department or by non-government organisations funded by the department
- ▶ Provide a forum for Aboriginal staff to be heard by the Executive
- ▶ Engage Aboriginal staff in decision-making.

2. Improve Aboriginal service delivery, through a coordinated approach that is flexible to local circumstances, client-focused and culturally inclusive

A coordinated approach to service delivery is paramount to FACS delivering improved outcomes for Aboriginal people due to special challenges and disadvantages they face. Aboriginal clients often present with multiple and complex needs that are not resolved by a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that ignore local diversity. Evidence demonstrates that effective coordination for service delivery in Aboriginal communities is best achieved by whole of government approaches involving "joined-up services, interagency collaboration and multi-agency partnerships*." The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) has made a strong start in this area of service delivery through its 'Build and Grow Program'.

In moving towards localised planning and decision-making, reducing duplication and developing our local districts, we must:

- focus on outcomes
- invest time and resources into community consultations
- apply a strengths-based approach
- support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.

**Effective practices for service delivery coordination in Indigenous communities, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Resource sheet no.8, December 2011*

2.1 Develop a Charter of Standards for Aboriginal service delivery that can be applied across the department

Many parts of FACS have guiding principles for working with Aboriginal people. They range from recognising the impact of Australia's early history and past government policies on Aboriginal people, to acknowledging their unique position as Australia's First Peoples, to realising that Aboriginal people know best their own needs. The recognition of traditional owners and paying respect to Elders past and present in official 'Welcome to Country' is a practical example of principles and values that impact positively on Aboriginal people. Examples include former ADHC's *Aboriginal Policy Statement*, *Community Services' Aboriginal Strategic Commitment*, and Housing NSW's *Commitment to Improving Service Delivery to Aboriginal People*. We will draw upon these values and principles to develop a Charter of Standards which reaffirms our commitment to and better informs our work across NSW with Aboriginal people. This charter will also be adhered to by the NGOs we contract to provide services to Aboriginal people.

The Charter of Standards for service delivery will be supported by a planning, accountability and monitoring framework, to ensure consistent standards are maintained across the department and its contracted providers. Initiatives developed by FACS districts will require appropriate levels of Aboriginal community engagement and participation.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Recognition and acknowledgement of the uniqueness of Australia's First Peoples
- ▶ Enshrine the department's values and guiding principles underpinning our work with Aboriginal people
- ▶ Values the cultural knowledge, contribution, strength and opportunities presented by our Aboriginal staff and their communities
- ▶ Ensure department delivered and department-funded services to Aboriginal people are culturally appropriate and inclusive.

2.2 Map Aboriginal specific services across the department with regular updates

FACS has started mapping our Aboriginal specific service delivery. This will assist Aboriginal units across the department to monitor and improve Aboriginal service delivery and remove duplicated services. A formal process will be established to monitor, review and update this information to ensure it remains current.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Up-to-date information on Aboriginal specific services available for policy program, review and development
- ▶ Resource available to all staff
- ▶ Regular monitoring and review reduces duplication of services
- ▶ Promotes communication, transparency and learning.

2.3 Develop an *Aboriginal Impact Statement* and guidelines for all policies

An *Aboriginal Impact Statement* will ensure that Aboriginal people are consulted in the development and implementation of FACS policies and that the specific needs of Aboriginal people and communities are always captured within policy-making. It will provide a consistent approach across the department to ensure that the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities is considered at all stages of policy development and implementation. It will operate as a checklist tool to assist in the policy engagement process.

The former Department of Community Services produced its version of an *Aboriginal Impact Statement* based on the *Keep Them Safe* initiatives to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

ADHC adapted their *Aboriginal Impact Statement* to align with policy development to assess how the policy will impact on the lives of Aboriginal people and their families.

We will design and produce a generic department-wide *Aboriginal Impact Statement* that can be adapted and applied across FACS central divisions.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Ensure that Aboriginal priorities and needs are considered at all stages of policy design and implementation
- ▶ Consistency of approach to build Aboriginal wellbeing into processes
- ▶ Ensure FACS service and department-funded service delivery to Aboriginal people is culturally appropriate and inclusive.

2.4 Develop an evaluation plan to measure the success of Better Outcomes

Reform directions are focused on improving services and lives and include significant reshaping of the service system. Evaluation is an essential pillar of these reforms to ensure that these policies and programs have delivered what was expected and to ensure timely adjustments as needed.

An Evaluation Branch has been established to implement the Evaluation Framework which aims to ensure a comprehensive, comparable evidence base of what works to meet clients' needs in the context of significant service and system change.

FACS Analysis and Research (FASCAR) has a brief to evaluate key departmental programs, and ultimately contribute to a comprehensive, comparable evidence base of what works to meet client's needs in the context of significant services and system change. FASCAR will work with program owners to design and undertake best practice evaluations of Aboriginal programs, including initiatives under *Better Outcomes*.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Develop best practice evaluation tools and resources such as evaluation guidelines, templates and tools
- ▶ Ensure the department remains transparent and accountable
- ▶ Ensure more effective and culturally appropriate service delivery to Aboriginal people.

3. Build workforce capability to work better with Aboriginal clients and communities, and improve Aboriginal employment outcomes through developing and promoting career pathways within FACS

FACS is committed to growing a strong, capable Aboriginal workforce, both within the department as well as in the non-government organisations we fund. Employment, like education, offers Aboriginal people the skills to operate on a level playing field, provides choices, increased self-esteem and personal pride. Increased economic parity helps to close the gap on Aboriginal disadvantage. FACS aims to become an employer of choice for Aboriginal people by providing real opportunities, mentoring and career pathways for professional development. While parts of the department have developed Aboriginal employment and retention plans, there is added value in integrating these into a single departmental strategy. That will assist FACS districts in developing plans and strategies and can also provide a successful, working model for Non Government Organisations to apply to suit their particular requirements.

3.1 Rescope the existing Aboriginal Employment and Development Framework

FACS is one of the largest public sector employers of Aboriginal people. We are proud of having a large network of Aboriginal staff designing and delivering culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal people in NSW. The increased number of Aboriginal people in the department's workforce is largely due to the successful application of strategic policies and initiatives. According to recent Equal Employment Opportunity reports, Community Services achieved an Aboriginal employment rate of 15 percent, Housing NSW of 7.3 percent and ADHC at just over 6 percent.

ADHC's Let's See It Through

Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2011-2015 in particular, commits the department to a new target of 10 percent of all staff being Aboriginal by 2015 and to ensuring Aboriginal staff are more equitably represented across all of FACS. We aim to build upon these strategies and increase our overall Aboriginal employment rate with the implementation of a revised Aboriginal Employment and Development Framework mirroring similar goals.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Consistency across the department with recruitment, promotion, retention and professional development of Aboriginal staff
- ▶ Expanded Aboriginal workforce reduces economic disadvantage and ensures greater Aboriginal participation in the design and delivery of more culturally appropriate and relevant services
- ▶ Aboriginal staff more equitably represented across all grades, districts and directorates.

3.2 Aboriginal NGOs are supported to be fully functional, sustainable, effective and achieve good governance

A draft NGO Engagement Strategy is being developed to provide a department-wide, integrated approach to NGO reform. Its primary focus is on coordinating, understanding and scoping existing activity in the department around NGO engagement. Its draft work program is focused on the following components:

- governance
- reform delivery
- funding models and management
- capacity building
- planning and innovation
- workforce.

The key objective of capacity building is to create a department-wide approach to NGO capacity building by engaging in a number of activities, including to “develop strategies to implement department-wide NGO capacity building approach.”

The governance body for this work is the NGO Engagement Steering Committee which comprises representatives from across the department.

Building Aboriginal and mainstream NGO capacity is crucial to successfully delivering services to Aboriginal people that is accessible, culturally appropriate, inclusive and empowering. Community Services has programs and strategies aimed at building community capacity to respond to challenges facing vulnerable Aboriginal children in need of protection, young people in out of home care, their carers and families. Both the AHO and Housing NSW help build the capacity of Aboriginal and mainstream community housing providers. AHO does this through their *Build and Grow Aboriginal Community Housing Policy* and in partnership with Housing NSW through the *Community Housing for Aboriginal People (CHAP) Strategy* which seeks to maintain an upward trend on the number of Aboriginal families living in community housing. These are important parts of the NSW Government’s commitment to *Closing the Gap* and overcoming disadvantage for Aboriginal people.

Cultural competency training is an essential component of capacity building in ensuring that all NGOs delivering services to Aboriginal clients are aware of cultural protocols and sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people.

Strategies like ADHC’s *Aboriginal and Cultural Inclusion Framework 2011-2015* aim to make services more culturally appropriate for Aboriginal communities while their *Aboriginal Service Delivery Model* deals specifically with improved access to disability services. These strategic initiatives raise staff awareness of the cultural and social disadvantages that older Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people with disability face and provide clear direction to the department and department-funded workers about the needs of Aboriginal clients.

Practical resources such as Community Services' *Aboriginal Consultation guide* are invaluable tools for all department and NGO workers, particularly frontline staff. We aim to continue working in partnership with NGOs, building their capacity and producing cultural competency training and resources to establish best practice procedures across government.

The benefit to FACS

- ▶ Stronger partnerships with NGOs funded across all government departments ensures more effective and accessible service delivery to Aboriginal people
- ▶ Increased awareness and understanding of the cultural and social disadvantages facing Aboriginal people
- ▶ Greater consistency of culturally appropriate programs and services for Aboriginal people delivered by NGOs
- ▶ Recognised leader in best practice procedures across government in NSW for effective service delivery to Aboriginal people.

4. Ensure a strong, coordinated response to the reform priorities under the NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs

The NSW Government's Aboriginal Affairs Plan – OCHRE was launched in April 2013. The process of developing the plan began in August 2011 with the creation of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs. It set about producing a new Aboriginal Affairs strategy with a view to improving service delivery and accountability, and improved educational and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. FACS will play an active role in ensuring that the reform priorities under the NSW Government plan for Aboriginal Affairs have a positive impact on improving Aboriginal people's lives by reducing disadvantage. Foremost among these is the department's ongoing commitment to developing the capacity of Aboriginal NGOs.

The department has pledged to lead the NSW Government in working with Aboriginal NGOs. Our specific commitment under the Plan is to explore opportunities to:

- Build the capacity of Aboriginal peak bodies to take a leadership role in capacity building across the Aboriginal NGO sector
- Assess the transferability of specialist strategies across sectors, test what works, and how it might apply more broadly in NSW
- Improve the targeting of generalist capacity and workforce development strategies to Aboriginal NGOs.

This work will build on the extensive work already being undertaken within the department to enhance NGO capacity and in particular capacity within Aboriginal NGOs to deliver sustainable and effective services to Aboriginal people. The first year activities (2013/14) will be establishing governance arrangements to progress this strategy, engaging Aboriginal peak bodies and other key stakeholders and mapping NGO capacity building activities across the NGO sector.

FACS will continue to work with Aboriginal Affairs through the Senior Executive Committee and Program Control Group to implement and support the initiatives in the OCHRE Plan.



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Artwork by Aboriginal artist Saretta Fielding