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Walking Together.
Changing Lives.*

From Little Things Big Things Grow

Our Nunga Babies Watch Project (NBW) in Adelaide continues to advocate and work together with Aboriginal people to ensure their voice is heard and their Rights are respected when interacting with the Department for Child Protection in South Australia.

There have been small progresses forward, including the February delivery of Auntie Pat's speech in South Australian Parliament House by local member Connie Banaros, the NBW team working with the University of SA to bring Social Work students to Tauondi Aboriginal College in Port Adelaide to do a more intensive cultural awareness program and the Aboriginal Voice to SA Parliament Bill being passed at a special sitting on March 26th.



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However, there is still much to be done. The NBW July update highlights the glaring inconsistency between what the Department for Child Protection (DCP) say they will do as opposed to what they actually do when interacting with Aboriginal families.

Among the list of common complains about the Department for Child Protection (DCP) in SA are, what NBW calls, “Opportunistic behaviour by DCP”. The report states that “informing a family member of DCP plans to take a child before the required process of Child Safeguarding Due Diligence and or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) is (not?) meaningfully accounted for. [There is] No substantive involvement of family, Aboriginal practitioner support person and or sharing of necessary information will create the opportunity for this type of behaviour.”

“The DCP appearing to do whatever they want, when they want with no accountability... No evidence is forthcoming to show active efforts have been genuinely and actively used, to achieve the priority of placing a child in kinship care.”
“And no translator or Aboriginal practitioner present – not knowing what is being signed, not wanting to say anything, for fear of saying the wrong thing....resulting in trauma of not understanding why a child is taken. DCP repeatedly do not have Aboriginal practitioners or support person present.”

NBW, supported by Mercy Works, exists to support Aboriginal families Voice when interacting with DCP. “If Aboriginal Voices aren’t heard, engaged with or encouraged, or silenced, and due diligence applied to the process, an opportunistic behaviour by DCP becomes evident. With no accountability, there seems a rushed pre-determined agenda toward long term ‘orders.’,” say the group.

A recent Summary Statement of Investigation by the Ombudsman SA, highlights DCP issues in response to complaints. NBW describes this as “another example as a culture of mis-guided use, or non-compliance of social work practice and statutory obligations.”



Auntie Pat heads up our Nunga Babies Watch Project in SA

One summary statement included in this report <https://www.ombudsman.sa.gov.au/publications/investigation-reports/2023-investigation-decisions> stated: “While not legislatively incorrect, the department’s actions and omissions created a risk of the child being disconnected from family and culture long term, contrary to the intended outcomes of the ATSI CPP (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle). This matter highlights the risks associated with superficial compliance with the ATSI CPP.”

The Ombudsman also concluded that the department erred in its handling of the complaint, and incorrectly applied its complaint handling policy, which resulted in the client being denied the right to an internal review of the department’s placement decisions. The Ombudsman has made four recommendations to address some of the issues identified, which the department accepted.

Mercy Works is proud to continue to support this important project to stop “another stolen generation” from occurring in South Australia.

This article first appeared in the September ‘Mini Bilum’ 2023 from Mercy Works. Mercy Works is the development arm of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea. For more information on the human development work of Mercy Works, please visit their website on www.mercyworks.org.