



FAMILY INCLUSION NETWORK

2009 NATIONAL GATHERING

26/27 NOVEMBER 2009

HOSTED BY FIN ACT Inc.

SUMMARY AND EVALUATION

Compiled by Sharynne Hamilton on behalf of FIN ACT Inc.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the land



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LIST OF PRESENTERS

- ❖ **Barbara Campbell, Campbell and Co. Lawyers, Legal Resolution Services.** “At the Coal-face: a lawyers perspective of representing children and parents in child protection cases and an alternative approach to the current system”
- ❖ **Cassandra Mackersey, parent.** “What works and what doesn’t: a Parent’s perspective”
- ❖ **Debbie Henderson, Family Inclusion Network WA Inc.** “Building Respectful partnerships: including Parents in the Child Protection System”
- ❖ **Frank Golding, Alliance for Forgotten Australia** “Learning from the past: Forgotten Australians”
- ❖ **Heather Douglas, University of Queensland.** “From family-centred to child-centred: effects of policy change in child protection on mothers: worker’s perspectives”
- ❖ **Jane Gordon & Kerry Thorne, Centrecare, SA** “Reunification in Child Protection”
- ❖ **Jodi Edgerton & Tammi Eppelstun, Belconnen Community Service** “My Family First”
- ❖ **John Berger, Family Inclusion Network WA Inc.** “Finding your way with DCP – an information tool for parents in the child protection system,”
- ❖ **Lynn Easterling: University of WA, PhD student and Social Work lecturer.** “The role of the state as Grandparent”
- ❖ **Mary Ivec , Regulatory Institutions Network, Australian National University** “Resetting the Relationship”
- ❖ **Patricia Hansen, Australian Catholic University & Frank Ainsworth, James Cook University** “Confidentiality in child protection cases: who benefits?”
- ❖ **Ros Thorpe & Annette Williams, Family Inclusion Network QLD, Townsville** “Resources for Workers & Parents”
- ❖ **Simon, Parent.** “Child protection, foster care and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child”
- ❖ **Sandie Griffin & Judy Delahunty, Centrecare SA** “Strengthening family relationships through family camps”

WELCOME – Mary Ivec FINACT Inc. Committee Member

Good morning everyone. My name is Mary Ivec and I am a committee member with FIN ACT. I am delighted and honoured to have the role of welcoming you all to this special event – a highlight of the year for the Family Inclusion Network ACT. I would first like to pay my respects to the Traditional Owners of this land, the Ngunnawal, to your Elders, past and present, to Auntie Pam Bell who is here today and Auntie Agnes Shea who will shortly lead us with her Welcome to Country.

I'll also be introducing our special guests today but would first like to start by giving a short overview of FIN organisations around Australia and a brief history of the Family Inclusion Network in the ACT. FIN ACT is luckily, not an only child. FINS began separately in Townsville, QLD and in WA in mid 2004 where professionals and parent's were coming together to address what they perceived as a gap in services to provide support and advocacy to parents who had had or were at risk of having their children removed by child protection authorities. FIN is an incorporated service in the ACT, WA, NSW, QLD and TAS, and has representation in SA, and discussions happening with interested parties in Victoria and the Northern Territory. Currently WA is the only funded FIN providing hands on services to parents and family members. FIN WA is auspiced by Anglicare WA. The FIN Australia Working Group is a group of representatives from each of the states and the ACT who meet via teleconference on a regular basis to share updates on state child protection issues, provide support to more recently established FIN's and work through an action plan developed at our first Roundtable in Brisbane in 2007.

FIN ACT was initially incorporated in February 2006 as CAPACT Inc, Caring and Parenting ACT, and endorsed by our Patron Ron Cahill as a very worthwhile initiative. The organisation's aim was and still is, to assist and support parents and families in crisis where a child or children have been or are at risk of being removed to out-of-home care. We are still seeking funding to be able to commence provision of services and to work with other service providers in providing co-ordinated and integrated care approaches to the diverse needs of parents and families with children in care. In 2008, CaPACT changed it's name to FIN and while the name changed, the philosophy of how the initial management committee saw the service developing remains unchanged. In 2008 FIN found a home with and was welcomed by Inanna Inc., a women's and family crisis accommodation service. Inanna's preparedness to auspice FIN ACT has meant a real growth spurt for FIN (which we hope will soon be matched by an income!). Inanna has for over two decades assisted women and families where child protection issues were being experienced.

The original FIN ACT committee of management comprised mainly of professionals who had over their careers or in their personal lives worked with child protection authorities – our former Chairperson, was herself a psychologist and had worked in the NSW Department of Community Services in child protection work. We had all had dealings with child protection workers and managers who had a great deal of compassion, who worked hard to develop

trusting relationships with their clients, and who had even joined volunteer programs with outside agencies to maintain relationships with their young clients when a restructure in their office meant they no longer were a caseworker for a young person in care.

In my own case, having worked with refugee survivors of torture and trauma for over a decade, I experienced trusting relationships built between workers across our Agencies, diverting families 'at risk' away from statutory intervention and into a community care model which supported the case work of my Agency. In those days, the community care model was known as the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme. In this model a voluntary group of community members came together – either through their church, or ethnic group to provide a range of support and assistance to newly arrived refugees. Practical assistance such as going shopping with Mum, helping enrol children in school, teaching English at home through the Home tutor scheme, trying to find Dad some employment, led to the forging of friendships and enduring relationships as each attended the other's births, weddings, funerals and other special ceremonies. It is through such relationships that trauma can begin to slowly, ever so slowly, heal.

However it was also during this time that as a counsellor/advocate I worked with a woman, who I will call Sonia, with three children ranging from primary school to early high school age. The eldest child had spent some time in foster care but had periods where he returned home. Issues of a young man in his early teens in conflict with mum about what he could and couldn't do had resulted in various foster care placements.

At the time of my working with Sonia, a notification was made by the school to child protection about the youngest child. Mum became upset, not understanding why this had happened, why the school hadn't spoken to her first and she was understandably distressed as to what would happen to her youngest child. On my phoning to speak to the child protection caseworker I was told, very calmly and politely, that it was only a matter of time before her other two children would come into foster care given that the eldest child had been in foster care. This conversation troubled me deeply.

The stigma that surrounds parents and families involved in child protection is best summarised by this participant in the research undertaken by Anglicare on behalf of FIN WA and published by Professor Maria Harries from the University of Western Australia in 2008.

Can you imagine the shame? How do you ever tell anyone they took your kids away? You don't. You just look at the pavement for the rest of your life — even though you did nothing wrong except to have no one to help when things got bad. (p.24)

I often wondered what would have been the outcome for Sonia and her eldest son had alternative processes been available – if an opportunity existed to heal the fractured relationship between them? Rather than statutory process, perhaps restorative justice processes which encompass restorative values found in international human rights agreements can offer us an alternative way of doing business when it comes to thinking

about children's safety and wellbeing. These restorative values include the restoration of human dignity, the restoration of damaged human relationships, the restoration of compassion and caring, the restoration of empowerment and the restoration of a sense of duty as a citizen – and could go further – the restoration of a sense of duty as a parent, when a parent has transgressed and required statutory intervention. Can we imagine creating such a restorative space in our contemporary child protection systems? The restorative justice work of John Braithwaite and the newly emerging approach being developed by Valerie Braithwaite and Nathan Harris at ANU on responsive regulation in child protection at the ANU offers some possible ways forward. (Our ACT Care and Protection Office is a partner in that emerging work).

The commitment of all FINNER's, in their various (mostly unpaid) roles, from all states who give of their time with tireless passion - parents who have experienced firsthand the impact of losing children or grandchildren, those with full-time workloads, and family commitments is truly outstanding and deserves recognition here today. The engagement in respectful dialogue with child protection services is a key aim of FIN.

We value each and every one of you here today – in whatever your capacity. We thank you for your generosity of time, your presence and your preparedness to listen. We expect that there will not always be agreement, that we have different truths and our own story to tell. We ask that each story and each person is honoured and respected for what they offer. We are all human and as part of that we judge – always. I am asking you for today and tomorrow that we try hard to suspend our judgements of others – to let down our armour and to engage in open and respectful sharing. The grounds here are beautiful and peaceful. If at any time you feel you need to leave and take a walk, please do so. But do please come back. Enough from me. I now have the honour to ask Aunty Agnes Shea for her address to us.



WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Aunty Agnes Shea

Family Inclusion Network ACT Inc – (FINACT) National Gathering - 26 & 27 November 2009

I wish to acknowledge the Ngunnawal, the Indigenous peoples of this land and to thank them for everyone's safe journeys to our nation. I call on all our Ancestors to be with us and bring us wisdom and compassion as we listen and learn from each other.

This National Gathering, called "Human Rights in Child Protection" is the first national event to be organized by the Family Inclusion Network ACT.

These two days bring together parents who have had their children removed and their families, academics, students, practitioners – be they child protection workers, legal people, workers in other services who interact with child protection authorities and researchers.

The timing of this conference could not have been better planned given the attention that has been focused on past policies and consequences of child removal.

We gather here over these next two days to explore, to share and to learn, from each other, from our combined, vast experience, knowledge, skills and practice wisdom.

Yet with all this knowledge, I hope you will also explore some of the basics – we know that families in need, vulnerable families, will gain nothing from being 'done to'. We must explore how we join and walk with each other, with our vulnerable families and our communities on their journey, on our journey. How do we remain in conversation with each other, with children, with family, with the systems of care which sometimes serve us and sometimes don't? Whether we are Indigenous or non- Indigenous, how do we invite and welcome each other into our lives, our families and our communities? How do we celebrate our many strengths and how does our presence make a positive difference to others?

I encourage you all to make the most of this wonderful opportunity and wish you well, not just for these two days but for all your future work – true reconciliation depends on each and every one of us.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS – CHAIRPERSON FIN ACT Inc. – Ms. Sharynne Hamilton

I begin by acknowledging the Ngunnawal People as the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and thank elders past and present, for allowing us to share with them in this space here at the Australian Catholic University.

I would also like to recognise and remember the work of Joe Goerke, one of the founding members of FINWA, who many of us knew and who will be remembered as a kind, considerate and caring man with an unyielding commitment to helping families. Joe was a Social Worker with what he liked to call “the Department of Many Names” (or as we know it, the Western Australian Department for Child Protection) His ability to inspire love, hope and empowerment in people was regularly acknowledged by the parents and families he worked with and his colleagues. Joe left us on 24 May 2007 but I’m sure is smiling down on us all today.

On 13 February 2008 generations of Indigenous People were apologised to for the horrific past wrongs to them. For the cruel and unlawful removal from family. For abuse in the institutions and foster care arrangements that housed them. For the unlawful past policies that saw horrendous abuses on the Indigenous cultures. Then just last week on 16 November 2009 we saw 500,000 care leavers addressed in the Australian Parliament in the “Forgotten Australian’s” apology for abuse and neglect in institutions and foster care around the country. We saw two commitments in the national apologies: The first in the apology to the Stolen Generations:

“... This Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.”

and the second in the apology to the Forgotten Australians

“A turning point for governments at all levels and of every political hue and colour to do all in our power to never let this happen again.”

I acknowledge that there are many different issues associated with the two national apologies, but today I want to focus on the importance of the apologies in its recognition, on both occasions, that there are long term consequences and anguish when families are broken up. Both apologies were meaningful because of the expression of empathy and the recognition of the compassion and sympathy to those who were wronged and those who have suffered harm while in the care of the State. This gathering and the panel discussion provides an opportunity to consider whether we are living up to the sentiments expressed in the apologies in contemporary approaches to child protection.

As admirable as it is necessary to acknowledge and apologise for the nation’s past wrongs in the wrongful and forceful removal of children from families, symbolic gestures are one off events which need to become practice: practice in law, practice in policy and most of all practice in the way we treat parents and families in Australia. We have a perfect opportunity to truly look at the effects these removals have had on past and present generations in Australia and to ensure we don’t repeat mistakes of the past.

We come together today, ready to discuss, how as a society and a community, we go about changing the way we deal with issues of at-risk children and families. It is important to recognise and

understand that we don't come here today to criticise individuals or child welfare departments, but rather, in the spirit of human rights – to open respectful dialogue on ways of moving forward. On ways of ensuring those past wrongs are never repeated.

However, I do contend that the coercive and unfair removal of children still happens – this is evident in the Georgia and Luke case heard in the NSW Supreme Court at the end of last year and beginning of this year. The parents of Georgia and Luke worked, had no history of drug and alcohol misuse. There was no history of violence, no history of mental health issues. DOCS had no grounds to remove the children from this family.

Justice Palmer found that personal judgments, inappropriate actions, unfair, unjust and what she termed “heavy handed” care plans placing unreasonable demands on the parents. A whole network and culture of human rights breaches were imposed on this family. In questioning DOCS officer's attitudes, Justice Palmer is driven to conclude that it is a result of “an intransigent refusal to acknowledge a mistake, regardless of the consequences to the children.” She also says:

“In my opinion, the answer to these questions is a serious abuse by certain DOCS officers of the Department's power to take children into custody under the Act. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that those officers grossly overreacted to the parents' hostility to DOCS' unjustified insistence that the children were at risk of harm. This case has been generated and fed into the legal system, with all its inherent delays, when it should never have been started in the first place”.

Georgia was only weeks old and Luke a toddler. Acknowledging the criticism not to be directed at the Director-General or DOCS generally, but at individual case managers who abuse their power for personal or vindictive reasons..... Justice Palmer found in her judgment:

“The circumstances which I have recounted amount, in my opinion, to a gross abuse of power on the part of the DOCS officers concerned. The result has been to remove young children from the care of good and nurturing parents for the last twelve weeks. The insistence by the DOCS officers that the Children's Court proceedings continue on their course and the children remain in custody pending their conclusion aggravates the abuse of power already perpetrated.” (Palmer 2008)

Georgia and Lukes' parents had the resources to instruct a lawyer and to challenge the decisions of DOCS in the Supreme Court. Most parents and family members, however, can't do this. They don't know where to begin. If, in the case of Georgia and Luke, supportive and alternative options like, for example, Family Group Conferencing had been initiated, the outcomes for the children and parents could have been very different.

This leads me to the theme of this year's FIN National Gathering – Human Rights in Child Protection. Human rights are the reason acts like the national apologies are so important. Human rights are about more than being legislated, judicial or constitutional ways of articulating rights. The basic principles of human rights are much broader and are deeply rooted in the history and great tradition of Australian democracy. The right to be free and autonomous, to be treated equally and not discriminated against, the right to equal participation in society and in political processes, and to be

treated with dignity and respect – but - these are things where that ‘right’ is not necessarily a legal provision but rather an expression of what we should do, of what is the decent, right and just thing to do. When we talk about giving people a fair go, we talk in a generalised ways of the respect we show other people and acknowledging that everyone has equal rights. Human rights are about social justice - about acting with kindness, respect and compassion towards one another.

Rights are often things which are particularly strongly claimed from governments but we often fail to see the action of this rhetoric. We know that some parents have poor parenting skills, we acknowledge that some parents do hurt their children either intentionally or - given the ever expanding definitions of abuse and neglect – without necessarily even knowing it - but we expect governments and the state to respect the rights of the parents – that is the right to know and not be denied your family. The right to know your children. This is an area where international human rights have been established - because this is one of the cruel, dark and shameful areas in not only Australian history - but indeed global history.

We assume that the State and Government is only rarely justified in limiting our rights. We assume our fundamental rights are about fairness and due process; of having just and adequate access to dispute resolution; or of the right to ask for a review when we think a decision is unfair or unjust.

Although I have given the very recent example of Georgia and Luke, which represents the individual misuse of power in child protection, I emphasise again that in general systems are the issue. There are limitations and processes placed on overburdened workers that require a less than compassionate approach. These workers are working with impossible systems in an area where processes are rarely challenged – this is an issue. And as a result families feel punished. Parents feel punished. And children feel punished. And there are ways of reducing personal actions in child protection and allowing transparent and accountable processes to happen that minimise unnecessary removals and strengthen intervention processes with families.

In Canberra two weeks ago, some of us here today attended a conference of leading child welfare academics from around Australia and overseas. The conference focused on the issue of child protection as a problem of regulation. Eight academics were invited to respond to a paper by Braithwaite, Harris and Ivec. Identified by the editors McArthur and Winkworth, was the key overarching message of the invited commentators - that a more responsive approach would strengthen the practice that is respectful of children, young people, parents, families and workers.

Braithwaite and her colleagues argue that responsive regulation is a way of shifting to practices that aim to support and empower families within a context of social acceptability. With the hope of eliciting new ways of thinking child protection practice and State intervention in the lives of families, Braithwaite discusses ideas of responsive regulation, or the idea that authorities will be more successful if they respond in flexible and adaptive ways, rather than the current “formalistic” systems, which take action through a particular set of responses guided by particular sets of categories. They argue that responding to families needs in a responsive regulation manner will be more effective, and they acknowledge that although more coercive forms of intervention are necessary in some cases, they should only be employed when dialogue and negotiation has been tried and been unsuccessful. The right of parents to procedural justice in child protection is an important issue that, according to Braithwaite and her colleagues, is the greatest tool that governments can use if they wish to obtain cooperation and compliance. Procedural justice ensures impartial processes which are fair and are, above all, respectful of everyone regardless of guilt or innocence. Braithwaite and her colleagues say

that “fundamentally important in procedural justice is engaging with families within a culture of respect.” Respect also of course being a fundamental component of human rights principals.

In her response article *Professional Responses: Who Does what in Domestic Violence and Child Protection*, Chief Social Worker, Department of Child Youth and Family – New Zealand, Dr Marie Connelly argues that while research indicates that exposure to domestic violence can be harmful to children, directing all cases to child protection systems unleashes a set of unintended consequences overwhelming statutory services which in turn elicits a response which is unproductive for families. Dr Connelly says that there is no question that the ‘one-stop statutory shop’ approach to child protection is buckling, and says that “we need to think carefully about the ways in which the state intervenes in the lives of children and their families.” Dr Connelly contends that providing statutory responses that are not on the same parallel as the needs of children and their families and therefore does not enhance the chances of good, long term solutions. Connelly surmises that the implementation of regulatory systems that match the presenting issues of families with expert professional services could firstly, enable family support workers services to work toward facilitating changes in families without involving statutory intervention, and additionally she says “that the service community needs to be integrated in ways that support the ongoing interests and aspirations of the people receiving the service”

Dr Judy Cashmore, Associate Professor, the Faculty of Law at the University of Sydney, concurred with many other reports that many children subject to statutory interventions do not need a statutory response but rather their families are in need of assistance. She agrees that government agencies need to be transparent and inclusive and give people affected by decisions a chance to be heard.

Professor Dorothy Scott, Director of the Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, argues that statutory child protection systems have screened large numbers of referrals for child abuse and neglect only to identify a small number of cases. She says the doubling of children in state care over the past decade as evidence of the state’s increasing use of its formal regulatory powers – it’s most extreme sanction – the removal of children. Prof Scott says that a new course for child protection requires it to be evidence based as well as value based while recognising that many problems families experience have macro causes such as homelessness, poverty and – as in the case of many victims of the Stolen Generations and the Forgotten Australians – intergenerational impacts of past policy and practice.

Professor Harries supports the concepts Braithwaite et al put forward, of using responsive regulation in examining what she termed the need for an urgent review of the regulatory systems of child protection. Harries counsels that “it requires a preparedness to expand community awareness and consciousness about what is meant by the expression ‘Child Protection is Everybody’s Business?’” Agreeing that child protection is everybody’s business, Harries epitomises the human rights approach when she says “we need to work with the idea of ‘human togetherness’ – that is that people live a set of relationships in civil society whereby they are engaging with each other rather than simply monitoring regulations.” The Family Inclusion Network, as acknowledged by Harries in her article, allows the voices of families and communities as key stakeholders in the lives of their children to be heard. Prior, there was no channel for this voice. This is how we move forward – with compassion, respect, transparency and accountability for all parties.

The importance of family and social networks is a constant theme in the literature examining out-of-home care, the yearning for family, for connection is well known in the child welfare field. Given the

focus of the investigatory role of child protection workers, there will always remain an inherent tension between it and the 'support' role often needed by parents. By helping parents to manage feelings and to manage problems, that is addressing directly with parents, the child risk-related issues, such as drug use or family violence. An independent body that supports parents from the beginning of involvement with child protection agencies is essential and potentially leads to a more open, transparent and accountable system. An opportunity now exists for interested professionals, community advocates, affected parents and families – together with child protection authorities to come together in dialogue – to work with birth parents in order to improve developmental and long term outcomes for their children.

It is my hope that the discussions that happen over the next 2 days will achieve ideas and ways of doing this. It is my hope that as we go back to our work and daily lives following this gathering, that we take with us ideas of human rights in our dealings with parents, families and communities. And it is my hope that we see changes incorporated at a policy, practice and broader societal level.

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PANEL DISCUSSION: Facilitated by Janenne Hamilton, Deputy CEO Relationships Australia.

PANEL

- ✚ Alasdair Roy, ACT Children’s Commissioner
- ✚ Jodi Edgerton, Parent
- ✚ Meredith Hunter, ACT Greens Parliamentary Convenor
- ✚ John Berger, Chair, FIN WA
- ✚ Barbara Campbell, Lawyer, Legal Resolution Services
- ✚ Andrew Horne, Young Person
- ✚ Pam Bell, Indigenous Elder
- ✚ Beverly Orr, Australian Foster Care Association
- ✚ Tracy Mackey, FaHCSIA
- ✚ Paul Wyles, ACT Care & Protection
- ✚ Judy Delahunty, Centrecare SA

The Big Picture

Social inclusion and child removal

Janenne Hamilton:

Children are often removed from their families for reasons directly related to poverty. In fact the Prime Minister in his Apology to Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants last week said “We reflect too today on the families who were ripped apart simply because they had fallen on hard times. Hard times brought about by illness, by death and by poverty.” Homelessness, mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, unemployment and crime also result in the coercive removal of children. Families experiencing such multiple stressors and disadvantages are much more likely to be involved or be at risk of becoming involved in child protection systems. And yet, given the rising incidence of these issues in society, the more likely and more frequent child removal is going to be.

Given that families in the child protection system are already social excluded or at significant risk of social exclusion, and that children involved in statutory child protection systems are at substantial risk of experiencing social exclusion, how does (or could) the federal government promote social inclusion principles¹ within state and territory child protection systems thinking?

Views:

- It’s about resources and the targeting of resources - to particular individuals and communities who are vulnerable e.g. Family Resource Support Program (FaHCSIA)
- Communities should assume the task that every child and parent knows that someone in the community, neighbourhood cares for them, someone will care

¹ <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Principles/Documents/SIPrinciples.pdf>

- Social inclusion is a joint issue for Government and communities, and as such, requires a joint response
- They say 'it takes a village to raise a child' keep this in mind when visiting family of different background and culture
- Every child is everybody's responsibility
- Drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence are not the same as poverty, mental illness, homelessness in terms of child protection 'risk' factors
- I was born in NSW grew up with a sense of neighbourhood, but that was lost when I moved to the ACT 30 years ago' - lack of TRUST within communities
- I grew up in a group home – it was hard to retain/accept my Aboriginal identity
- I wanted to be 'normal' not different. I was forced to go to Aboriginal functions, I didn't want to go. It impacted on how I saw myself as an Aboriginal person.
- Refugees /new arrivals are not getting the support to understand how systems work here.
- importance of non-government services being heavily involved rather than government heavily involved.....particularly with Indigenous communities
- non-government organisations often have better relationships with communities
- ACT labour govt - community inclusion board - but programs funded for only 3 years
- Governments do have a role to play > vision, policy, resources
- Communities role = people to participate and work with these programs
- Community building - neighbourhoods, through schools, neighbourhood centre and building networks
- Poverty not just about dollars but also relationships, access to programs and resources
- Needs a 'Grass Roots' movement
- 'FEAR' - around the idea of a child wandering the neighbourhood - getting snatched etc. - these perceptions are very real
- Real need to have focus on early intervention prevention not only better than a cure, but cheaper than a cure
- There is a need to stop things coming to the pointy end of child protection system.

- Danger is to try to find model that fits all communities - its not 'one size fits all'
- Each community has its own formula
- Take instead of looking for a model that works for all communities, take instead common principles of common engagement
- Tendering process alienates collaboration among community organisations
- Parents/families shouldn't have to ask for help, systems are built on people assuming that people in need ask for help
- We should be asking people if they need help through neighbourhood networks
- This question implies care and protection only take children away from people who are poor - this simply doesn't happen.
- What are our priorities? Development? Shops? Bus stops? We get together as a community to protest against a road or a bypass, against environmental damage, but not against care and protection taking children away from a family in the community.
- Role of government - we all have different roles in community which changes at different points in time.
- Government roles vary from leadership to communicator
- In most states and territories there is a shift in care and protection to favour kinship care - seeking out extended family as carers - significant re-orientation of the system.
- In the ACT this year there have been more Kinship care placements than Foster care placements

Processes in the System

Widening the definitions of abuse and neglect

Janenne Hamilton:

The definition of what constitutes child abuse and neglect has been widening over recent years, arguably contributing to an increase in removals and placing strain on existing resources. Is this widening the net not just part of the cycle which follows a high profile death of a child? The cycle being media frenzy and judgments, public outcry, political scandal, governments under pressure to do something tougher, blaming case-workers, getting rid of senior bureaucrats and demands that parents 'shape up'.

Views

- Most recent years there has been a widening of the definition of child abuse and neglect + more mandated workers - increase in reports to Care & Protection.
- There has been a broadening of the definition which is related to impact on children, research of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, attachment and literature on brain development.
- Not necessarily broadened but changing
- Long term neglect of child is recognised as being more traumatic
- Child protection systems are risk averse = more kids in care. Family support ultimately = less kids in care - studies support family support systems.
- There needs to be a format that can be introduced to support families that are practical –ie. parenting support - has to be up front.....currently it's too late

Mandatory reporting

Janenne Hamilton:

Mandatory reporting has deepened the mistrust of authorities by many struggling families. As a consequence families are fearful of engaging with services, or even their local communities, making them even more isolated, less supported and at greater disadvantage. Mandatory reporting also overloads the system.

What are the benefits of mandatory reporting? Do these benefits outweigh the negative and unintended consequences?

Views

- Mandated reporters believe that they discharge their responsibility by alerting child protection services. They have responsibilities beyond phoning child protection.
- Mandatory reporting impacts quite a bit, because it makes parents wary of asking for help, this is a very real fear.
- In certain circumstances, mandatory reporting is wrong = perpetrates fear and mistrust in the system, = often reports are made falsely or in the wrong circumstance.
- Since mandatory reporting, the best thing is that it has allowed better data collection, and accuracy of data has significantly improved. We have a better picture of what is happening.
- Community services often don't report either - they assume other agencies that are involved with the family.

- It is unacceptable that people assume someone else will report = this is what leads to situation where a child dies.
- There is a real need for collaboration.
- Working in the Housing department, we have experienced fear of mandatory reporting.
- Phone calls are recorded, another deterrent for people in need of help.
- In WA courts are opposing the idea of mandatory reporting.
- 85-90% of all the calls that come in are because families are under stress rather than children being in need of the care and protection – there is a need for community response for majority of those calls

The Practice of respect

Janenne Hamilton

Parents and families involved in child protection systems refer to the ‘unleashing of disrespect’ they experience at the hands of state child protection systems. For those parents who are poor, who have mental health issues, who struggle to maintain secure housing in today’s housing crisis and rising rentals, respect is something they are seldom accorded. What would a practice of respect look like in child protection practice?

Given that Australia has developed National Practice Standards for the Mental Health (state-based) workforce, what barriers exist to the engagement of such a strategy for the child protection workforce?

Views

- There is a fear in Indigenous communities because it’s intergenerational. Fear is inbuilt.
- Welfare spelt backwards = Farewell
- Needs to be more respectful - take the word ‘neglect’ out because it is pre-judging.
- Our (Indigenous) children are still moving today, just as much as ever. Bring communities together and have a TALK to them, attitudes need to change from top to bottom.
- We can learn a lesson in the ACT – Mandatory reporters should be educated in how to access community services as opposed to reporting. We need to support the people engaged with it.
- Language is very important – in New Zealand Care and Protection equivalent’s message = ‘We are here to help you’ and there is an emphasis on family group conferencing - language drives how people approach child protection matters.

- Ask the communities what they want and how they want it. Don't ask and then not listen, don't decide and then ask and don't say you're going to involve them in the process and then not
- When we do offer support and engagement, do it in a way that's meaningful and constructive.
- We work in the system but we don't necessarily agree with it.
- One difficulty is timeframes; length of time for departments to do their thing is too long.
- DoCS get it horribly wrong – quite a lot – take children that shouldn't be taken, and leave kids that should be taken.
- WA system is doing a good job.
- The system and the department is too confrontational – parents are already stressed and confused.

Legal and process issues

Janenne Hamilton:

The experience of navigating the legal system is, for many parents, overwhelming, frightening, confusing and alienating. There is little or no support for parents to understand the processes that they are involved in, or to understanding their rights and legal responsibilities within these processes. They often do not know how to obtain information, advice or legal representation and as such can be naïve or inadequately prepared for or represented in court. Parents express powerlessness related not only to the child protection process, but the legal process and court proceedings as well.

How can we ensure that families facing statutory intervention are adequately informed and have access to appropriate legal advice and/or representation? Why is it that funding for lawyers dealing with child protection matters has reduced? (Especially Indigenous lawyers).

Views

- Legal aid criteria is so strict – stresses parents out even further ('lack of merit' cases)
- Legal Aid criteria is too strict now
- Is court the right place to resolve these issues? What about family relationship centres and preventative measures
- Culturally appropriate tribunal/new model e.g. Victoria's Koori Courts
- There are a number of other models that should be considered.

- the 'voice of the child' is still not being considered.

How do we get the voice of the child into the court process?

- We were asked at school how we were punished... I told the truth – 'I was flogged'. they alerted DoCS straight away and I knew I would be removed if I continued with the truth so I said I told a lie, because in the end – I'd rather deal with known fears rather than unknown fears.
- This is a classic example of the problem = attachment vs. 'neglect'
- Education could help in these situations more than removal.
- Children only know one way of living – that's the one they're going to choose.

Accountability

Janenne Hamilton:

What accountability is in place for parents and children to have their cases reviewed? Is this the best way, from a human rights perspective, to work towards a responsible and accountable child protection system where honesty and transparency is encouraged for all parties? How do we incorporate human rights in child protection practice effectively?

How can we make the system accountable to Human Rights?

Views

- Family is a natural and fundamental group unit and is entitled to protection by state and government - if family rights to protect the child fails then child's right must be upheld by others.
- Human rights are not absolute: rights of family to care for child are not absolute – child has rights too.
- Child protection systems need an external umpire but who umpires the umpire?
- Child protection systems need to be more open and transparent and accountable.
- We manage to get message to governments that are cognisant of human rights – but what about non-government sector?
- As of Jan 1 2009, amendment of the Human Rights Act in the ACT which makes it unlawful for any public authority to violate the Human Rights Act.
- We are seeking amendment to ACT to make it possible for people to complain right to the commission as opposed to going through current process (complaints process)
- This is happening in the ACT but this needs to happen across Australia.

Restoration

Janenne Hamilton:

Evidence suggests that successful restoration is more likely to occur when contact with birth families is frequent. There are examples of a child's "attachment" to carers being used to delay or deny restoration to birth families.

How do we ensure healthy attachments to parents are encouraged with restoration being a key goal in the child protection system?

Views

- Communication is the key
- If carers are moving they need to let parents know
- Due to limited resources = parents unable to maintain contact if carers move.
- Reunification process starts too late and ignores the attachment of the parent and child.
- It takes a lot of time to achieve restoration, and often access is cut
- It should be compulsory to make up visits that have been cancelled.
- It is unfair to parents/families and the kids to cut visits.
- Parents also have a fear of the system when making contact/having visits.
- Told that his biological mother would come, but lack of resources and a fear of having other children taken away prevented this from happening.
- For a long time until recently, foster parents and biological parents were not allowed to meet. This is beginning to change.
- A greater link between foster and biological parents should be supported unless there are serious issues.
- If parents want children back they will be appropriate.
- Biggest problem in foster care has been getting department support to work with biological family.
- We have made several family friends as a result of collaborative effort at restoration
- Teach parenting skills rather than telling them to just 'get them'
- Sometimes it takes going against the rules and apologising afterwards.

- Restoration plan – should work with ALL families involved= carers families, koori/bio families
- The Department and carers need to be reminded that they do not own these children – they must work with extended family on both sides.
- What role does politics play in monitoring the existing system?
- At a political level the changes there are changes being made to the new Child and Young people’s Act – with extensive consultation
- Political lobbying for an inquiry into best interests and rights of Children and Young people in the ACT which raised issues such as Department not following through that children in out of home care were safe and well.
- There is a role for govt to take a lead: to scrutinise, to ensure best systems, to respond to constituents.
- I agree that politics does have a role. My role is to offer govt advice as advocate and children’s commissioner.

Wrap up

Janenne Hamilton:

There is an emphasis on research and the importance of having voices of stakeholders getting fed back into inquiries. If goal is to build parental compliance to prevent child abuse and neglect, but we continue to use the current disrespectful measures and neglectful systems, then it is a paradox in itself. What is one thing that could make child protection system better?

Views

- A national child protection framework – we all need to look at how to keep children safe, not have 8 different systems
- It’s about being creative.
- Re-orient resource allocation to front end prevention and early intervention.
- Introduce mandatory family group conferencing at first notification - work with families, draw on current supports and provide additional support.
- By treating families in a fair and equitable way. Through early intervention, respect and social inclusion. Currently any intervention is pretty much crisis driven.
- Look broadly at housing and other concerns – don’t just look at child protection in isolation
- More intensive supports, early intervention, 24hr support for families.

- National Human Rights Bill
- Review of the human rights act in the ACT – expanded to include social and cultural rights, housing, education.
- Increased access to and collaboration of services
- Housing and Centrelink need to come on board.
- Acknowledge the cycle of child protection systems, that of intergenerational trauma
- More follow up with more assistance
- Acknowledge family attachment to ensure the maintenance of contact with family
- Through up-front involvement, training, assistance within the home.
- By encouraging foster parent and biological parent relationships
- By codify the law to establish national consistency
- Let's take successful programs like New Zealand – rather than reinventing the wheel.
- Honesty and transparency
- Explanations: in our way (Indigenous), - listen and learn our way
- Re-vamp the spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of parents and carers
- Recognise different roles, skills and expertise that we can use together
- 'public awareness' model (= like a "sun smart" campaign in Australia) vs. 'surgical model' (= removal of cancers)
- education and prevention rather than continual removals of children without any attempt at supporting parental education.

END OF DAY 1 - DISCUSSION

What is 'neglect'?

- ❖ 'Abuse' is easy to define,
- ❖ 'Neglect' is harder to define
- ❖ Cultural differences in child rearing means that the definitions between two different cultures vary considerably.
- ❖ Redirect resources from crisis end to prevention end

Role of media:

- ❖ Media so ferocious about negative stories, making politicians promise to put more Money into crisis stuff rather than preventative stuff
- ❖ This results in removal of children at a higher rate
- ❖ Sibling relationships need to be acknowledged.

Views expressed

- Accountability – to birth parents, to communities
- What is accountability? Who is accountable – for sexual abuse in care?
- Schools are accountable for bullying, but no one is accountable for what happens to kids when they're not with their parents
- FIN has a role in attempting to hold child protection authorities more accountable to parents
- A lot of people trying to ignore the fact that poverty is an issue in child protection - Poverty is a HUGE issue
- Children are not restored because mother is homeless, mother can't get priority housing without children
- Child protection authorities deny poverty is a factor because if they acknowledge it, the government would have to do something about it.
- Make it compulsory for Children & Family courts to publish what happens in child protection.
- Increase public awareness and demand for accountability
- This would be a major confidentiality issue!
- Collaboration with parents and child protection.
- National parenting certificate when received education about child development should be mandatory for child protection worker and parents.
- But you can't get a certificate to say you're not going to suffer DV or mental illness.

- There's a real problem with the way attachment theory gets used in child protection.
- No evidence that attachment is static and will not improve and cannot have multiple attachments
- Young workers making amateur judgments based on attachment theories – using them in the wrong way.
- “Normal is a setting on the washing machine”.

“Early intervention”

- Patronising, punitive and top down.
- Parents ask for “help” not “intervention”.
- We need to rewrite the discourse.
- Same as the “best interests” of the child – who defines this? What are the best interests of the child?

“Intergenerational aspects”

- Stigma of foster kids amongst authorities.
- Need to identify care leavers who are parents as group of people with special needs of support.
- Acknowledge parents, grandparents who are care leavers.

“Child Protection Kinship options”

- They are not doing things quickly enough! ALL processes take too long.
- Kinship carers are used by departments, not treated like foster carers, no government funding or support.
- Foster carers get paid to look after kids, they can often afford to anyway, kinship carers don't get paid.
- Closure – give parents a timeframe for release of “intervention”
- When are they going to close the case?
- Children are still going to court, why do we continue with that model?
- NSW Dept as a result of the Woods Commission, tried to abolish Children's Court.

- Tribunal is only alternative, but tribunal would be appointed by the Department.
- Adversarial way = Department needs to prove they can do a better job of bringing up child.
- We MUST move from 'best interests of the child' to 'least detrimental treatment of the child'.
- Legal Aid has been tightening their purse strings – denying worthy cases legal aid on 'lack of merit'.
- Community legal centres are fighting this on behalf of women in the ACT.

Pat Hansen and Frank Ainsworth

The FIN-NSW ethical code of practice for child protection aims at transparency in child protection cases. The code of practice protects child protection caseworkers from allegations of unfairness and deception, stops parents from being able to claim that they were not properly informed about the stages in the child protection process and 'the best interests of the child' for whom socially just practice, if they are removed from parental care is vital, are safeguarded by this code.

A Child Protection Code of Ethical Practice

Preamble:

This code of ethical practice observes the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The singular term 'child' is used throughout the code of ethics. It can refer to more than one child.

The paramount concern at all times is to protect and respect vulnerable people.

Human rights

1. A child protection caseworker will at all times respect the rights and dignity of parents.
2. This respect will be maintained by the child protection caseworker regardless of any suspicion or reports they have that suggest that the parents have abused or neglected their child.
3. In the course of an investigation a child protection caseworker will never address a parent dismissively or sarcastically.
4. A child protection caseworker will not raise their voice to a parent or threaten a parent emotionally or physically in any way that might frighten or humiliate them.
5. A child protection caseworker who intends to meet with another agency (i.e. pre-natal clinic) about the need for a child to be removed from parental care must inform, and invite the parent to all such meetings. There will be no secret meetings.
6. Should an interagency meeting decide that a child should be removed at birth from a mother and that an 'alert' notice to this effect should be placed on the mother's medical file then the child protection caseworker must inform the mother about this action. At the same time the child protection caseworker must tell the mother that she has a right to inspect her medical file.

Note: An 'alert' notice is a notice that tells medical staff that they must inform the child protection authority once a mother gives birth. This then enables a child protection caseworker to attend the medical centre and remove the child from a mother's care.

7. If an 'alert' notice is placed on a mother's medical file hospital staff must be free to discuss this matter with the unborn child's parents.

Legal rights

8. At the first contact with parents a child protection caseworker will inform the parents of their right to legal representation.

9. The child protection caseworker will provide parents with a written statement as to their legal rights.

10. Prior to questioning parents a child protection caseworker must inform parents of their right to have a support person with them throughout the investigative process.

11. Until the issue of legal representation and the presence of a support person have been resolved the child protection caseworker will not proceed with the investigation.

12. Should the issue of legal representation and support for parents remain unresolved after 'in good faith' negotiations the child protection caseworker may exercise the power given to them by legislation and proceed with the investigation albeit in the presence of a support person.

13. A child protection caseworker will not take photographs of a parents' dwelling unless they have specific permission from the parents and the parents' legal representative.

14. Should the issue of legal representation and support for parents in regard to photographing a parents' dwelling remain unresolved after 'in good faith' negotiations then the child protection caseworker may exercise the power given to them by legislation and proceed with the photographing of the dwelling albeit in the presence of a support person.

15. The child protection caseworker will within 24 hours provide parents with a copy of any photographs they have taken,

16. In order to ensure transparency in the child protection process a child protection worker will provide parents with a copy of any notes she/he made, and those of an accompanying worker, within 36 hours of the investigation being undertaken.

Parent-child contact visits

17. If a child is removed from parental care the child protection caseworker will immediately tell the parents when and where they can next have contact with their child and for how long. This information must be provided in written form.

18. When supervising a contact visit between a child and his/her parents a child protection caseworker will make certain that the place where the contact is to occur will be a comfortable child and family friendly setting.

19. A child protection caseworker will not threaten a parent with termination of contact with their child before a meeting has been called to resolve any contact visit issues that are causing concerns about the continuation of contact. The parent will be entitled to have a legal representative and a support person at any such meeting.

Restoration or reunification

20. Within 48 hours of the removal of a child from parental care, and before any court action has been initiated, the child protection caseworker will provide the parents with a detailed list of the issues that caused the child to be removed and indicate in detail what actions the parents must take for restoration of their child to their care to be a realistic possibility.

21. Once the child protection caseworker has provided a list of the required actions no variation or additions to the list of actions will be made by the caseworker, or any other person.

22. If a baby or very young child is removed from parental care and an order is sought that gives the Minister parental responsibility for the child until the age of 18 years, the CSA (formerly DoCS) adoption option must be openly discussed with the parents before a Care Plan is filed in the Children's Court

Court processes

Preamble:

A child protection caseworker, like an expert witness, has an overriding duty to assist the Court impartially on matters relevant to the case that is being heard.

23. A child protection caseworker will never submit to the Children's Court papers that contain rumour or innuendo about a child parents. Only substantiated facts are to be presented in Court.

24. When submitting material to the Children's Court a child protection caseworker will make certain that the material is verifiable and is neither inaccurate nor misleading.

25. A child protection caseworker will not make a statement in materials submitted to the Children's Court about the parents medical condition unless they have evidence from an accredited medical expert that confirm this condition.

26. A child protection caseworker will not make statements in material submitted to the Children's Court about the parents' psychological state unless they have evidence from an accredited psychological expert that this is an issue.

27. Throughout the child protection process and after final orders have been made a child protection caseworker will remain courteous and respond in reasonable time to a parents telephone calls and other enquires about their child.

FRIDAY MORNING OPEN DISCUSSION

- We need to look at change to mental health and disabilities systems for inspiration.
- Findings from early 1970s study has been replicated in every study since:
 - Parents experience of exclusion from child protection interventions and the negative consequences.
- Social workers were the dominant profession in child protection in the 70's.
- Shift in QLD from 'family focus' to 'child focus' → parents = 'bad', (poor law principles)
- There has been a move away from employing social workers in child protection.
- Young SWs get swamped by organisational practices and values early in their career
- At least they have AASW code of practice to satisfy, other professions do not.
- FIN Code of Ethics will provide framework of accountability for child protection workers.
- Change in focus from family to child.
- Lack of provision of services to family.
- 2009 – No attempt to provide rationale for removal or any evidence of provision of family support.
- Fear that if a child is not removed before damage occurs, more damage will occur
- Perry – brain development research has influenced shift in this focus
- Court proceedings instead of focussing on providing rationale for removal, focus on checklist of parent failures
- Some experiences include: - leave a phone message and never get a call back
- Verbal abuse from child protection workers, abuses of power
- Once restoration is ruled out, parents are not given any more information re: the child.
- Child protection workers are not adequately qualified – two I recently dealt with – one had an exercise science degree, the other an early childhood education degree.
- Social Worker's, lawyers, psychologists have code of ethics.

- DoCS workers: what frames their practice? = departmental guidelines.
- Child protection ethics should not be set by bureaucratic organisations or govt departments
- When you get arrested by police, they tell you your rights, but that doesn't happen in child protection.
- Mental Health National Standards – this started 20 years ago, and came from consumers → need standards for child protection.
- Mental Health = state responsibility, just as child protection = state responsibility.
- But this can't come from govt, needs to come from non-government organisations, consumers, "change from below".
- FIN discussions with KPMG, Allen Consulting Group
- The AGE today reports on the Victorian Ombudsman's report into child protection services in Victoria ??

EVALUATION

Over the 2 days participants attended the gathering. Of these, 28 participants filled in the Gathering Feedback Form.

- ❖ 26 participants attended both days with 2 attending Friday only.
- ❖ Of the 28 participants, 25 were female and 3 were male.
- ❖ Of the 28 participants, 7 were parents. 15 were social workers/community workers/support workers. 2 were academics, 2 students, 1 private investigator and 1 did not answer.
- ❖ 2 participants identified as Indigenous/Aboriginal.

The venue was good

- ❖ 20 participants strongly agreed. 8 agreed.

The catering was good

- ❖ 22 participants strongly agreed. 5 agreed. 1 was neutral.

The conference format was easy to understand

- ❖ 17 participants strongly agreed. 7 agreed and 4 were neutral.

The panel discussion drew out issues and allowed effective debate

- ❖ 4 participants strongly agreed. 7 agreed. 11 were neutral. 3 disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed. 2 did not attend Thursday.

Parent issues were well represented

- ❖ 16 participants strongly agreed. 6 agreed. 3 were neutral, 1 disagreed, 1 strongly disagreed and 1 did not answer the question.

The support staff were helpful

- ❖ 18 participants strongly agreed. 6 agreed and 4 were neutral.

The presentations and standard of speakers was very high

- ❖ 10 participants strongly agreed. 17 agreed and 1 was neutral.

Strategies for a positive way forward were determined

- ❖ 8 participants strongly agreed. 13 agreed, 6 were neutral and 1 disagreed.

The aspects of the gathering which were found the most relevant or important.

- ❖ Parents experiences.
- ❖ Young person in care experience
- ❖ The idea of addressing the apology and implications for future developments in child protection practice.
- ❖ Hearing the effects of child protection practice on parents gave a greater understanding of the importance of the role of the family and extended family.
- ❖ To hear everyone's point of view.
- ❖ To see people who had very different point of view being so relaxed and tolerant of each other's views in a non-judgemental way.
- ❖ Networking/food/sharing ideas and new concepts.
- ❖ The South Australian Family reunification presentation.
- ❖ Frank Golding's presentation.
- ❖ The panel idea – to hear a mix of people involved in all different areas of child welfare. ALL!
- ❖ The keynote address was excellent!
- ❖ FIN WA information booklet.
- ❖ Using lived experiences to support a framework.
- ❖ Strategising for a positive way forward. The panel was really good.
- ❖ Getting to know about people in Government departments.
- ❖ Hearing the great work already being done by FIN WA.
- ❖ Other successful programs.
- ❖ Differences and similarities shared by those from other states.
- ❖ ALL OF IT!!
- ❖ Loved the didgeridoo!
- ❖ Brave, strong and articulate personal experiences.
- ❖ Different models of practice.
- ❖ The panel was great, the human stories were great and the educational aspects were great.

- ❖ Learning from each other.
- ❖ The didgeridoo and the choir were a great way to start.
- ❖ Realising that nothing has really changed in thirty years!
- ❖ The panel and the presentations.

Suggestions for improving future FIN National gatherings.

- ❖ More Aboriginal participation from parents, families and workers.
- ❖ More official input from community representatives.
- ❖ The powers that came down from their ivory towers could have stayed for lunch and had a chat with people.
- ❖ Sitting around tables rather than in rows.
- ❖ Greater community publicity.
- ❖ More input from solicitors. 2 days not long enough.
- ❖ Longer presentations and longer panel time for discussion/questions.
- ❖ More time for discussion and debate.
- ❖ More question time for the panel.
- ❖ More advertising – more services could have benefitted from this gathering.
- ❖ Where were the staff from child protection??
- ❖ More opportunity to debate panel discussion.
- ❖ More interactive sessions.
- ❖ Development of FIN strategies to share nationally.
- ❖ An hour of the panel at the start of each day. Less questions and more audience interaction with the panel.
- ❖ More time for parent presentations and discussion with each other.
- ❖ Attendance of more parents, family members and grandparents.
- ❖ Attendance of more government representatives to attend panel session.
- ❖ Include international perspectives – i.e. Scandinavian.
- ❖ 10 participants too many on the panel.

- ❖ Disappointing to see the government workers leave after the panel – perhaps next time have them in the middle of the day and hope they stay for a longer period.
- ❖ Use of microphone.
- ❖ All fans should have been on high.
- ❖ Some FIN's views were extreme – this may not be seen as a way forward to building relationships.
- ❖ Some panel members were rather limited in its knowledge of child protection in other places.
- ❖ Time keeping of presenters should have been adhered to.
- ❖ I found the “My Family First” session made me quite angry. I have had experience as a parent with this program (in another state). It was judgemental, patronising and closely linked with the Department. I walked away from it. These two speakers painted a picture which was the opposite to my experience as a parent with “My Family First”.
- ❖ There was little recognition that removal must occur for child safety at times. More time on what we want and less on what's wrong might have been a better use of time as we all know the system's bad.
- ❖ Be careful who you hold up to tell their story/be the story of FIN.
- ❖ FIN should be represented at Indigenous conferences – i.e. SNAICC and others.
- ❖ More monitoring of group reactions. Some were aggressive and too emotional which changed the atmosphere and lowered the standard for the gathering.
- ❖ Who will the government be apologising to in 50 years time?
- ❖ A more balanced approach is required – not heavily weighed on either side.
- ❖ We also need to keep in mind that we do need to respond effectively to assist the children who do not have the same power as adults.
- ❖ Panel members should have stayed to hear parent's presentations.

OTHER COMMENTS

- ❖ Excellent opportunity for social work students to gain insight into this very important area of practice. The gathering has ignited the fire in my belly!
- ❖ Really great, need more people to hear this terrific stuff!
- ❖ Truly informative and beneficial. Totally worth attending.
- ❖ Great 2 days.

- ❖ Excellent to come together.
- ❖ Good to see gathering kept affordable.
- ❖ I loved the venue and the food.
- ❖ I'm impressed about the passion with which people work from.
- ❖ Fantastic and very overdue in meeting a need for parental representation.
- ❖ The co-ordinating staff provided amazing feedback, positive encouragement to all and were very supportive in information provision.
- ❖ Well done!
- ❖ Very happy I attended – with thanks.
- ❖ I'm very glad I attended.
- ❖ Thanks!!
- ❖ It was very cool.
- ❖ It only took 1 year and 41 days to build the Empire State Building – what a pity; more than fifty years and we still have to talk about building respectful relationships between parents and child protection workers.
- ❖ When's the next one? We need more of the Family Inclusion Network.
- ❖ From listening to each State talk, I can see a huge benefit for FIN to be a united voice as opposed to some states being more radical with views and ways. Even though I love this approach I also see it as one that will lose credibility for the organisation.
- ❖ FIN should be represented at Indigenous conferences – ie SNAICC and others.
- ❖ The gathering confirmed my decision to become a social worker (within the right organisation 😊)
- ❖ Overall, an enjoyable, informative and enlightening experience. Well done!!

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