



Nugel

Community Protecting Boorais

Information Sheet for Community

An Aboriginal-led response to keep children safe

From September 2023, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is providing an Aboriginal-led alternative response for a small number of child protection reports about Aboriginal children in Northern Metropolitan Melbourne. Delivered by VACCA's Nugel team, this new Aboriginal led response to child protection reports will build on Nugel's successful family strengthening and reunification work. Community Protecting Boorais will allow for the inclusion of cultural responses and will actively work with families to keep children safe. This new approach furthers self-determination for Aboriginal families and communities in making decisions about their children.

Background

Established in 2017, Nugel, which means "belong" in Woiwurrung language, was established so that Aboriginal children know they belong and have a sacred place at the centre of Aboriginal communities. They have a right to be seen, to be heard, to be nurtured, and to be safe. They have the right to know who they are, where they come from and where they belong.

Nugel implements Section 18 of the Child Youth and Families Act which transfers responsibility for decision making and direct work with Aboriginal children and their families from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to VACCA. Although access is limited by funding, the program has already

demonstrated improved results in reunification, parental involvement in decision making, keeping children connected to their culture, and better health and wellbeing outcomes for children in the program.

How will it work?

If a report is made to Child Protection about an Aboriginal child, and Child Protection believe that further information is needed to see if the child is safe, they will be required to consult with Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS). If it's decided there is a need for further follow up and the child lives in Northern Metro Melbourne, they will hand the work over to Nugel (if they have capacity).

This means that instead of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Child Protection visiting, VACCA may visit to look into concerns that have been reported. VACCA may also work with families to address concerns if they exist and refer families to get help if needed. If the concerns are really serious and children cannot be kept safe at home at this point in time, this may mean taking action to find somewhere safe for children to stay. This would preferably be with family and/or in Community while the concerns are addressed. This may require taking the matter to the Children's Court.

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VACCA

Connected by culture

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

Community Protecting Boorais

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How will an Aboriginal-led response to Child Protection reports be different?

Community Protecting Boorais draws on the Aboriginal practice wisdom formed working within Community for 40+ years, applying this to a new model that will be different to current Child Protection responses. VACCA is deeply committed to looking after children and keeping them safe. VACCA understands that the best way to do this is to work together with families and to wrap around services and supports that help families care for their children.

Community Protecting Boorais strives to assert its statutory authority wisely in a way that does not step on or step over, but instead supports and strengthens the rightful roles of Aboriginal families and communities in the care, protection and guidance of their own children. We strive to engage with families so we can understand what is going on in the family and how best to respond to the concerns raised in the report. This is the phase of Understanding Story.

If a report has been substantiated, we then move towards the phase of Stepping In and Strengthening Safety Together (Protective Intervention). The emphasis on 'Strengthening Safety Together' reflects our commitment to a strengths-based approach – finding, working with and building up those people and circles of care around the child who can strengthen the safety of the child now and into the future.

What can families and children expect?

- We will empower families to look after their children
- We will act to ensure children are safe
- We will act in the best interests of the child, understanding that this generally means keeping children at home with their families
- We will show consistency with communication and workers so families know who to contact

- We will listen and make sure families have a voice and are part of decision making
- Our workers and case managers have an appreciation for Aboriginal culture and understand the differences in how families grow up kids
- We will make sure families understand their rights and the processes that are happening
- Information will be kept secure and private and only shared with permission and where laws allow, the child information sharing scheme allows for information to be shared between authorised organisations to promote a child's wellbeing or safety
- We will issue legal proceedings if this is the best option to ensure the child's safety.

What if families of children disagree?

If someone disagrees with a decision VACCA has made that has affected them, they will be able to ask for it to be reviewed by a more senior VACCA manager.

VACCA also provides information to parents and young people on how to access an independent complaints process and legal assistance if they feel they need to do so.

Contact us:

If you have any questions, please phone VACCA on 9287 8800 and ask to speak to a manager in the Nugel team.

Or for more information, go to www.vacca.org