

## About Berry Street

Berry Street believes children, young people, and families should be safe, thriving, and hopeful. We have provided services to children, young people, and families for over 140 years to address the effects of violence, abuse, and neglect and are now one of Victoria's largest out of home care (OOHC) providers.

We also provide a range of family support, parenting, education, leaving care, therapeutic, and family violence programs for vulnerable families, children, and young people, working with partners across sectors and the community.

Berry Street is committed to diversity and inclusion across the organisation. This includes diversity in our workforce and operating in a way that is culturally safe for our workforce and the people we work with, as well as in our relationships with the broader community.

Victoria is proudly multicultural. In providing child and family services, we work with many families and young children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, particularly in areas of Victoria with high migrant populations. As such, we are well-positioned to provide insights on the early childhood engagement of CALD communities and welcome the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry.

## Introduction

The child and family services system in Victoria, which encompasses family services, Child Protection, and out of home care (OOHC) services, can be complex and difficult to navigate for any family experiencing the challenges and vulnerabilities that bring them to the attention of Child Protection. That complexity and difficulty can be compounded for families who also experience cultural and linguistic barriers.

There is significant diversity within Victoria's CALD population; from newly arrived refugees to second and third-generation migrant populations. Victorians come from over 200 countries, speak more than 260 different languages and celebrate 140 different faiths.<sup>1</sup>

The child and family service system needs to be designed to respond effectively and safely to this diversity. Yet at Berry Street we see that for families from CALD backgrounds, especially more recent migrants, navigating the service system can be more of a challenge because of language barriers, unfamiliarity with both institutional systems and local services, and the other risk factors that are associated with migration such as housing insecurity, financial stress, and social isolation.

Pinpointing particular issues can be a challenge because little information is currently available that specifically considers the experiences of CALD families and young children in the child and family services system. A 2011 scoping study estimated that 14% of the children in OOHC in Victoria at that time were from a CALD background<sup>2</sup> but data collection and reporting of CALD status is limited across the child and family services system and the exact number of children from CALD backgrounds involved with the Child Protection

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/discover-victorias-diverse-population>

<sup>2</sup> Kaur, *Culturally Sensitive Practice in OOHC (2014)* (available at <https://www.fcav.org.au/images/carer-resources/information-sheets/Culturally-Sensitive-Practice-in-Out-of-Home-Care-Guide.pdf>)

system in Victoria is not known (see Section 1). In the literature, most of the work with Australia's CALD communities focuses on adults or young people aged 12 years and up, while most of the literature on the child and family services system does not specifically consider CALD service users.

There is evidence to show that CALD families in Australia are less likely to access early childhood education and care services and are less likely to know what services are available. This can lead to negative long-term outcomes including poor outcomes on social and emotional measures, academic measures, and health measures.<sup>3</sup>

This is consistent with a growing body of evidence showing that young people from CALD backgrounds have lower health service utilisation rates, lower workforce participation rates, lower sport and recreation participation rates, higher risks of homelessness, and higher risk of mental health issues.<sup>4</sup>

There is very limited evidence as to the specific needs of CALD children and families in the child and family services system, but anecdotal evidence from practitioners suggests that they face some common issues that may prevent them from accessing the full range of supports that are available to them.<sup>5</sup>

For example, we know that some CALD families may have low awareness about Child Protection and its statutory power, the different components of the child and family services system, or the support services available to them (see Section 2). In order to improve understanding of and engagement with the child and family services system among CALD families, we need to develop communications strategies that are targeted towards CALD families, including resources in their own languages and visible access points in their own communities.

We also know that, once engaged with the system, CALD families are often faced with the stressors of language barriers, issues around the use of translators and interpreters, and culturally inappropriate service delivery in the system including Child Protection workers or caseworkers who may be lacking in cultural competence (see Section 3). We need a sector that is equipped with the staff, training, and resources it needs to provide culturally competent intake, enrolment, and service delivery to children from CALD backgrounds.

Fundamentally, we need a system that is designed to be more culturally responsive and delivers a culturally appropriate service from the planning stage through to implementation (see Section 4). Presently, the system lacks the funding and resources required to achieve this.

The development of sector-wide best practice guidelines for working with young children from CALD families alongside increased funding and resources targeted specifically at developing the sector's ability to work to those guidelines would be extremely valuable in improving the sector's engagement with CALD communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University (2016) (available at [https://www.ecaconference.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Verdon\\_Inspiring.pdf](https://www.ecaconference.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Verdon_Inspiring.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> See MYAN's *CALD Youth Census Report (2014)* (available at [https://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CALD%20Census%20Report\\_Digital.pdf](https://www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/CALD%20Census%20Report_Digital.pdf)) and the Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people: A literature review (2014)* (available at <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1410/literature-review-cald-children-and-young-people-october-2014.pdf>)

<sup>5</sup> See: NSW Department of Community Services, *Culturally appropriate service provision for children and families in the NSW child protection system (2010)* (available at [https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/321621/research\\_cald\\_families\\_summary.pdf](https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/321621/research_cald_families_summary.pdf)); FECCA, *A Vision for Culturally Competent Practice in Children's Services (2015)* (available at <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Australian-Mosaic-Issue-39.pdf>); Kaur, *Cultural Diversity and Child Protection (2012)* (available at [https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural\\_diversity\\_child\\_protection\\_kaur2012\\_a4.pdf](https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural_diversity_child_protection_kaur2012_a4.pdf)); AIFS, *Working with CALD adolescents (2015)* (available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-adolescents/reports-policy-papers>)

## 1: Robust data collection and reporting

In order to accurately assess the needs and outcomes of CALD children in the child and family services system, we need robust data collection of indicators related to culture and language at all key points of engagement with the system: from the first point of interaction onwards.

At present, data capture of these indicators is low and can be unreliable. One example is the L17 form used by Victoria Police to refer young children impacted by family violence to Berry Street's family violence services. Just 28% of L17s referred to Berry Street from July 2017 – June 2019 that included children aged 0-8 had the child's country of birth filled out.

This extremely low rate of completion meant that Berry Street was only able to identify 40 children out of 10,470 who were born outside of Australia and might need extra help or support within the system. Where the child's mother is identified as the victim on the L17, data capture of her country of birth, language spoken, or need for an interpreter is also low and can be unreliable; this issue was raised during the Royal Commission into Family Violence.<sup>6</sup>

Child Protection notifications and referrals are also not consistent in capturing data on CALD background, ethnicity, language spoken at home, or religion of children and families in notifications or referrals. Most organisations that offer services to CALD children receive referrals from multiple sources and the inconsistency of data collection around CALD status makes it challenging for those services to identify and provide for their needs or evaluate their outcomes.

This also limits further research that is needed to understand the service needs of CALD children and families, such as research into the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in CALD communities, the unique needs of CALD families who become involved with Child Protection, the placement needs of CALD children in OOHC, or the outcomes for CALD children engaging with child and family services compared to the general population.

**Recommendation 1: Develop and implement best practice guidelines for capturing data relating to CALD children and families throughout the child and family services system, particularly at first points of interaction such as Child Protection notifications and L17 forms**

**Recommendation 2: Berry Street recommends these guidelines capture country of birth, ethnicity, language spoken, and religion**

## 2: Awareness and understanding of the child and family services system among CALD families

Families from CALD backgrounds, especially more recent migrants, may have low awareness and understanding of the child and family services system.<sup>7</sup> In particular, they may not be aware of the statutory role of the Child Protection system, or the support services available to them in their area, such as parenting support or family violence support services.

This lack of awareness is a key barrier to young children in CALD families accessing the supports they may need and, when the role of Child Protection is unclear, can also drive suspicion or mistrust of the child and family services system.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Summary.pdf>, pg 25 and Recommendations

<sup>7</sup> Kaur, *Cultural Diversity and Child Protection (2012)* (available at [https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural\\_diversity\\_child\\_protection\\_kaur2012\\_a4.pdf](https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural_diversity_child_protection_kaur2012_a4.pdf))

Targeted communications strategies that make information about the child and family services system available to communities in their own language would be extremely useful in overcoming this barrier. Working in partnership with community organisations, resources could be developed to support community education campaigns.

**Recommendation 3: Develop targeted communications strategies for CALD families about the Child Protection and child and family service systems**

### 3: A culturally competent child and family services system

Cultural competency in the sector is key for engaging CALD children and families with child and family services. Currently, staff in the sector are not always equipped with the training and the resources they need to provide culturally competent intake, enrolment, and service delivery to children from CALD backgrounds.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has outlined the following potential elements of a strategy to develop the cultural competence of the sector:<sup>8</sup>

- Professional development of staff through ongoing cultural sensitivity and competency training
- Coordination and collaboration of mainstream services with multicultural or ethno-specific services
- Services that are more available and more visible to culturally diverse communities
- Employing bicultural workers

In addition to these recognised ways to develop the sector's cultural competence, there is evidence that the use of bicultural support workers within the child and family services system to support sector staff has impressive outcomes for young children from CALD communities.

In Victoria, the VICSEG Family Mentoring program<sup>9</sup> pairs a bicultural support worker with a family from the same culture. The Family Mentor assists the family to navigate the child and family service system, acting as a 'bridge' between CALD families and the service system. The program was formally evaluated in 2011 and positive outcomes included improved social skills for children involved in the program and increased knowledge among family about the child and family service system generally and the services available to them specifically.

In New South Wales, the Ethnic Community Services Cooperative coordinates NSW Bicultural Support,<sup>10</sup> a pool of over 350 bilingual and bicultural children's services 'inclusion' workers who are provided on a reactive and time-limited basis to education and care services that need support enrolling and settling a child from a CALD background. Bicultural Support Workers facilitate communication between services and families, encourage cultural awareness amongst service staff, support programming development at the service, and provide resources and linkages to other ethnically specific services. The program is highly regarded as a model of good practice.

Berry Street recommends that the Department work with partners in the sector to develop a strategy for expanding the cultural competency of sector staff by providing CALD-specific training opportunities and opportunities to be supported by bicultural support workers. The strategy should also include a recruitment strategy for more bicultural workers into the sector. Berry Street further recommends that the Department develop a policy framework at the state level to link CALD children and young people to the services they need and make referral pathways clear within the sector.

<sup>8</sup> <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Australian-Mosaic-Issue-39.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.vicsegnewfutures.org.au/vicseg-programs/family-and-childrens-programs>

<sup>10</sup> <http://ecsc.org.au/our-programs/multicultural-childrens-services/bicultural-support>

**Recommendation 4: Develop a strategy for improving cultural competency and bicultural support across the sector**

**Recommendation 5: Develop a policy framework to link CALD children to the services they need and make referral pathways clear within the sector between mainstream services and CALD-specific services**

#### 4: Culturally responsive service delivery

A culturally responsive child and family services sector would:<sup>11</sup>

- Design and deliver service delivery models that can be flexibly tailored to a specific community
- Build institutional knowledge and capacity for engaging with CALD children and families
- Improve data collection and formally evaluate how programs service CALD communities
- Provide cultural competency training and professional development to staff
- Provide community-specific training and resources for carers and case workers
- Always use accredited interpreters when they are required
- Develop and implement strategies for recruiting bicultural staff, case workers, and carers including foster carers
- Consult properly and involve CALD families in service planning and implementation
- Ensure culturally appropriate strategies for placement and support plans for children from CALD backgrounds in OOHC

At present, the sector is stretched and under-resourced, and needs increased funding targeted specifically at its capacity to engage with CALD children and families in order to deliver this level of service.

Where programs at Berry Street are able to deliver this kind of culturally responsive best practice, we see the most positive outcomes in our work with CALD children and families. One example is our Take Two program, an intensive therapeutic service for infants, children, and young people who have suffered trauma, neglect, and disrupted attachment. Many children from CALD backgrounds are referred to Take Two by Child Protection. These children come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances and all have experienced substantiated child abuse, neglect, or trauma.

Take Two is a promising practice program and has been shown to be effective at supporting children to overcome the developmental and psychological difficulties resultant from these experiences. The program recognises that connection to culture is a protective factor for children and includes it as an integral part of assessment and service planning for children from CALD communities.

Part of the program's systemic work with a child from a CALD background would always be to ensure they have connection to their culture, particularly if they are living in residential care or with a foster family from a different cultural background. Some examples might be advocating for the child to attend community events, linking them with their extended family, or cooking culturally significant meals with them in

<sup>11</sup> Literature on best practice for culturally competent child and family services includes: FECCA, *Youth and Children Policy Statement (2007)* (available at [http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/policies\\_2007013.pdf](http://www.fecca.org.au/images/stories/pdfs/policies_2007013.pdf)); CCYP WA, *CALD children and young people literature review (2014)* (available at <https://www.ccyw.gov.au/media/1410/literature-review-cald-children-and-young-people-october-2014.pdf>); Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education at Charles Sturt University (2016) (available at [https://www.ecaconference.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Verdon\\_Inspiring.pdf](https://www.ecaconference.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Verdon_Inspiring.pdf)); FECCA, *A Vision for Culturally Competent Practice in Children's Services (2015)* (available at <http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Australian-Mosaic-Issue-39.pdf>); AIFS *Working with CALD adolescents (2015)* (available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/working-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-cald-adolescents/reports-policy-papers>); Kaur, *Culturally Sensitive Practice in OOHC (2014)* (available at <https://www.fcav.org.au/images/carer-resources/information-sheets/Culturally-Sensitive-Practice-in-Out-of-Home-Care-Guide.pdf>); Kaur, *Cultural Diversity and Child Protection (2012)* (available at [https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural\\_diversity\\_child\\_protection\\_kaur2012\\_a4.pdf](https://www.unisa.edu.au/contentassets/463f611a5f8645c09e089cd8cb43c7e0/cultural_diversity_child_protection_kaur2012_a4.pdf))

residential care. The aim is to create a positive connection to their culture to help them feel a sense of belonging and connection that is positive and protective.

Take Two practitioners spoke of wanting to have more resources available to them for engaging with CALD children, including dedicated training around working with CALD communities, resources that detail appropriate ways to work with specific cultural groups, and a database of culture-specific resources and support services or organisations so that they can refer clients to the services and supports that are best for them.

Berry Street recommends that the Department develops thorough best practice guidelines for the child and family services sector around working with young children from CALD families and then provides increased funding targeted specifically at developing the sector's ability to work to those guidelines.

**Recommendation 6: Develop best practice guidelines for the child and family services sector around working with young children from CALD families**

**Recommendation 7: Targeted funding to develop the child and family services system's capacity to deliver culturally responsive best practice to children from CALD families**