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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

'That's the bloodline': Does Kinship and care translate to Kinship care?

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Abstract

Kinship for First Nations people is a fundamental, yet complex, element of one's culture, enabling both belonging and relationality, and extending beyond blood family and relations. Kinship is also recognized as important within out-of-home care (OOHC) systems, with *kinship care* being the predominant OOHC placement type in Australia (AIHW, 2021). However, when First Nations children and young people are removed by the state, and placed into OOHC, it is important to interrogate whether kinship placements enable cultural connection and continuity with First Nations ways of understanding Kinship. This article begins by contextualising current OOHC policy and practice in Australia where a westernised and homogenised concept of kinship care is touted as similar to First Nations notions of Kinship. Here, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) has become oversimplified by equating kinship care with relative care, thus creating ambiguity in care and placements in OOHC, voiding First Nations traditions and ways of understanding Kinship while a young person is in care. This article then reports the findings of qualitative interviews with 37 First Nations and non-Indigenous people concerning the use of the term 'Kinship' in OOHC in New South Wales (NSW), how it is operationalised and how it is understood. Wide-ranging experiences by participants concerning Kinship within OOHC were evident, thus demonstrating the imperative for a broader understanding of Kinship. This understanding needs to be applied within OOHC in ways that are consistent with First Nations notions of Kinship, as kinship care placements on their own are not enough to keep children connected in culture. The findings from this

study show that the term Kinship is applied problematically within OOHC in NSW by equating legal and policy definitions of kinship care with Aboriginal ways of understanding Kinship. Ensuring First Nations traditions, practices and notions of Kinship are applied for First Nations children and young people in OOHC contexts is paramount.

KEYWORDS
child protection, First Nations, Indigenous, kinship, out-of-home-care

1 | INTRODUCTION

> "Kinship to me is family. You know, it's one big knitted family and you can go up to your first cousin. My first cousin are my kids' aunty and they respect that. And all the elder fellows, they're my aunties and uncles. That's how [I] reared my kids up. Be respectful and look out for each other as a community and a family".
>
> (Daisy, Aboriginal Education Officer and Community member)

Kinship for First Nations people is a fundamental element of one's culture, enabling belonging and relationality, extending beyond blood family and relations (Moreton-Robinson, 2017). Martin (2008), a Noonuccal, Minjerripah (North Stradbroke Island – south east Queensland) and Bidjara (central Queensland) woman details Kinship as *"a network of social relationships and a form of governance including relationships and inter-relationships of all creation: from the celestial; to mother earth; to all inanimate formations or objects; to living creatures that fly, live on and within the earth, the waterways and seas; it includes Aboriginal peoples"* (Martin, 2008, p. 66). First Nations understandings of Kinship vary considerably from western, Anglo-Celtic notions of kinship, equating specifically to biological or social relations (Barnes, 1961; Gellner, 1957; Holland, 2012; Schneider, 1965).

First Nations people of Australia are uniquely diverse, with various forms of governance and specificity to Country (lands), with more than 250 languages including around 800 dialects, spanning a landmass which is twice the size of Europe (AIATSIS, 2021; Bourke, 1993; Dudgeon & Bray, 2019). This diversity also extends to Kinship systems, involving complex lores that regulate relationships to Country, family, community, culture and spirituality (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019). These relationships have been detailed across disciplines, including recently by Gamilaraay academic Jared Field (2021) who demonstrated Gamilaraay Kinship systems through mathematical modelling of belonging and marriage. Martin Nakata (2007), expresses Kinship for parts of the Torres Strait through the engagement of older folk showing their children relations through channels of river systems. Internationally, other First Nations peoples,[1] like those from Turtle Island North America have many similarities in relationships and inter-relationships concerning Kinship (Bell & Romano, 2017). For example, Thomas King (1990) and Sinclair (2007) refer to the inclusion of all things as being "all our relations". Similarly, the Māori people, Aotearoa (New Zealand's Indigenous people), view Kinship in holistic ways, where Papatāunuku is the land, the earth mother which gives birth to all things, including Māori (Dell, 2017). This creates a unique connection to the environment, through spirituality, identity, social structure for Māori, as distinct from Pakeha beliefs and attitudes (Challenger, 1985; Harris & Tipene, 2006; Lockhart et al., 2019). In addition to this diversity and complexity, specifics within each First Nation must be understood and acknowledged, without homogenising First Nations people nationally or internationally within the colonial Australian context. For each First Nations group, there are mob-specific traditions, knowledges, kinship, social structure and beliefs.[2] Furthermore, at another level there is diversity between individuals from the same First Nations group, due to their subjectivity and experience of Indigeneity.

The information and laws involved in Kinship, for the various First Nations people of Australia, are passed down from generations through *Elders*[3] and their engagement with the next generation of Aboriginal children and young people (King, 2011). The role of Elders can be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand: there is the strong reliance on Elders as respected knowledge keepers and key decision makers within families (Walker, 1993). As Yolanda Walker (1993) illuminates, the guidance from Elders is transmitted through engagement with others during everyday life and their teachings are often imparted subconsciously, as "we follow, we observe and we go on to teach our own families" and through Elders and community the connections are kept alive (Walker, 1993, p. 26).

However, as stated by the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec),[4] there is no uniform definition of First Nations Kinship, particularly within an OOHC context. Currently, kinship is referred to as a statutory arrangement referring to children and young people being placed with relatives, friends or local community members as *decided by child protection agencies* (Boetto, 2010). Conversely, some Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) define Aboriginal Kinship as "the biological bloodlines that have been passed on from generation to generation" (QATSICPP, 2018, p. 4). Others define Kinship as people related through language groups, skin name or other cultural identifiers (AbSec, 2018). Given the complexity of First Nations understandings of Kinship, in the out-of-home care (OOHC) contexts in Australia, 'kinship care' placements for First Nations children and young people may not reflect, and incorporate, First Nations understandings and practices of Kinship, thus imposing a risk to cultural connection.

2 | WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE IN THE OUT-OF-HOME CARE AND PROTECTION SETTING?

In the Australian context, child protection (CP) and OOHC is co-ordinated, and managed jurisdictionally by the various Australian States and Territories, thus creating variation concerning OOHC practices across the country. In New South Wales (NSW), the focus of this article, once a child is removed by the state's CP system, they are placed into statutory OOHC. In the NSW OOHC system, the young person will stay under the oversight of the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the Minister of Families and Communities, to have their care handled by DCJ or be handled by a statutory OOHC provider (designated agencies) (NSW Office of the Children's Guardian, n.d.). There is also variation in these designated agencies, as they can be First Nations-specific Aboriginal Community Controlled Agencies (ACCAs) and mainstream agencies, both for-profit or not-for-profit.[5] Following this there are a number of OOHC placement arrangements which can ensue, including foster care (where the child is placed with an unrelated foster parent), residential care (where the child is placed in a residential facility),[6] adoption (permanency) and kinship care[7] (where the child is placed with a state-approved relative or community member) (AbSec, 2017). Kinship care is the preferred placement type for all children and has long been considered within legislation and practice guidelines as the best form of OOHC placement (AbSec, 2019; Arney et al., 2015; Lock, 1997; SNAICC, 2017). This is why in Australia, just over half of all children in OOHC are placed in relative/kinship care, with 53.6% of all children in OOHC nationally and 54.1% of all children in OOHC in NSW residing in kinship care placements (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2021). However, kinship care as a concept and placement type derives from legislation in the UK (Farmer & Moyers, 2008). As such it represents a foreign contextualisation of 'kinship', which homogenises and negates the complexities of First Nations people in colonial Australia and their Kinship. This is an area requiring urgent attention.

For First Nations children and young people in OOHC in Australia, the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) guides placement decisions and is the major safeguard for cultural connection in care. (SNAICC, 2017). The ATSCIPP is the main safeguard within government policy, implemented initially in the 1980s, as a result of advocacy efforts from within

Aboriginal communities (Dyer, 1980; Krakouer et al., 2022; Libesman, 2011; Tilbury, 2013). The ATSICPP consists of five dimensions – prevention, partnership, participation, placement and connection (SNAICC, 2017). Within all state and territory legislation, such as the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 NSW*, there is a preferred hierarchy of placement options for Aboriginal children who enter OOHC, where placement with Aboriginal or non-Indigenous family is at the top of the preferred placement hierarchy.[8]

However, compliance with the ATSICPP hierarchy is problematic, as there has been a declining percentage of Aboriginal children placed with their Aboriginal family over the last 10 years, from 40.6% in 2010 to 32.8% in 2019 nationally (AIHW, 2020). These young people are technically being placed within their Kinship system, however, they are with non-Indigenous family, who often are less engaged and removed from First Nations community and Kinship. Of particular concern to cultural connection for Aboriginal children in OOHC are placements with non-Indigenous family members, which are compliant with the highest level of the ATSICPP placement hierarchy. Aboriginal children and young people can be placed within kinship care, with someone from their Kinship group who is either Aboriginal or non-Indigenous, however, this does not ensure connection to their Aboriginal culture. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who have the opportunity to actively engage with their cultural knowledges and practices, needs to be interrogated.

3 | SITUATING THIS RESEARCH

Kinship processes play a fundamental role in First Nations child development (Bamblett et al., 2012; Turnbull-Roberts et al., 2021; Krakouer et al., 2022). The *Bringing them Home* (BTH) report strived for the implementation of the 'Indigenous Placement Principle' hierarchy, where placements should be made in accordance with First Nations lore and engagement with Elders and community. In particular, the BTH report recommended that placement should be in accordance with the notion of family at the scale of 'local custom and practice' (HREOC, 1997, pp. 516–17).[9] However, in contemporary OOHC contexts, it is not clear if kinship care placements nurture, and impart, First Nations knowledges, community and practices in OOHC. Further clarity is also needed in relation to how Kinship is understood for First Nations people. This research aims to illuminate the complexities of Kinship for First Nations people by interrogating whether kinship care placements meet the cultural needs of First Nations children in OOHC in NSW. It seeks to explore how Kinship is understood from First Nations perspectives in OOHC in NSW and how First Nations understandings of Kinship vary from western understandings of kinship care. Finally, research about First Nations people's needs to be completed by First Nations researchers and communities, to disrupt the continuing misappropriation of First Nations knowledges, and the positioning of First Nations groups as 'subjects' (Putt et al., 2013). As First Nations voices continue to be overlooked and white-washed, as a Gundungurra man and researcher, I engaged in collaboration, and sought advice and consistent confirmation from the First Nations Advisory research committee at each stage of the research.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted as part of a PhD project, through engagement with AbSec and a First Nations Advisory research committee. Participatory Action Research was used in the committee, based on an awareness of the need to involve stakeholders in the research process to ensure the findings are relevant and able to strengthen capacity within local communities (Fals-Borda, 2001). The University of Technology Sydney's (UTS) Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this research (Ethics IDETH18-2922). The study was an exploratory research project which aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of First Nations people in NSW OOHC. The participants

were recruited with the assistance of AbSec and direct contact with OOHC providers, through emails, flyers and social media campaigns.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-seven participants (thirty-two First Nations) from six participant groups that were currently or previously involved in the NSW OOHC system, including (1) First Nations young people (18–30 years of age) who have gone through the OOHC system in the last 10 years from 2019 (n = 5), (2) Parents (n = 3), (3) Family members (Siblings, Aunties, Uncles, Grandparents) (n = 3), (4) Carers and Guardians (n = 6), (5) Community members (Elders, Extended family, Advocates) (n = 11) and (6) key OOHC departmental and agency staff (n = 9). Participant groups 2–6 included First Nations and non-Indigenous people who are currently engaged in the OOHC system.

The interview schedule and questions were piloted prior to the fieldwork. The fieldwork included metropolitan, regional and remote communities across the colonial state of NSW including eleven first nations groups. Following the completion of interviews, interview data was entered into NVivo for analysis with participants being assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. As a First Nations researcher I drew on Indigenous Standpoint theory in conjunction with Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) in approaching and analysing the data, from the premise that individuals construct meanings that influence the interpretation of their experiences and knowledges, including their experiences of and within various systems (Charmaz, 2014; Mey & Mruck, 2019). Braun and Clarke's (2012) Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to process data involving a six-stage procedure. The analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2012) TA stages allowed for (1) transcription, (2) reduction of the data, (3) initial codes, (4) coding, (5) clustering and (6) the thematic representation of interview data (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In following this six-stage process, the codes were able to arise from my continued interaction with the data (Robson, 2011 p. 467) and interpretation of the participants' experiences.

5 | FINDINGS

The following sections dive into the interviewees' thoughts, understandings and ideas, specifically relating to Kinship. The findings section creates a discourse of individual and collective views of Kinship, kinship care and these concepts in OOHC.[10] In the thesis data this article has drawn out two core issues and these will be further analysed in the findings section (see Figure 1, below), including (1) what Kinship *means* for First Nations people, represented by the overarching theme of '*The multifaceted understandings of kinship*', which includes the subthemes of kinship as culture and connection, kinship as Country and belonging, kinship as family, kinship as identity and '*one of the lucky ones*', and (2) how Kinship is (mis)understood and (mis)applied within the OOHC system, represented by the overarching theme of '*confusion in understanding kinship*', which includes the subthemes of 'it's not our word' and 'agency, placement and carers'. These key themes and their subthemes are visually represented below in Figure 1.

5.1 | The multifaceted understandings of kinship

This section addresses the participants' voices and understandings. Margaret, for example, emphasised the intricacies, importance and essence of Kinship, articulating the ways in which Kinship for her, as a Barkindji women, is linked to her identity, family and belonging.

> It's who I am, like the essence of who I am. It's my identity. It's family, it's belonging. It's my mob. You know, it's just where I fit into everything.
>
> (Margaret, First Nations carer and Community member)

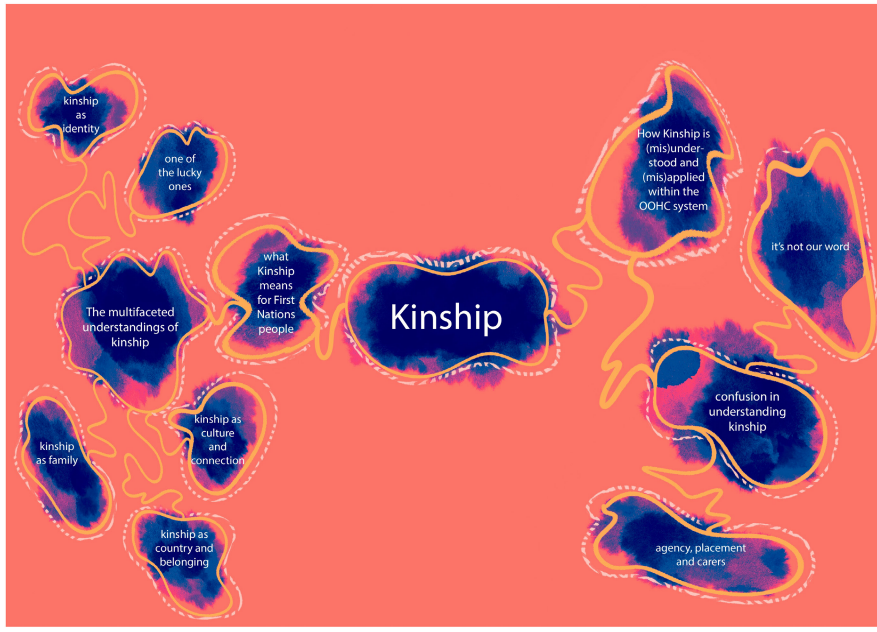

FIGURE 1 Thematic map- Kinship findings

In discussing the notion of Kinship, thirty-four (92%) participants expressed multifaceted understandings of Kinship, where Kinship consisted of several interconnected dimensions, including *Bloodlines*, *Connection*, *Family*, *Culture*, *Country*, *Identity*.

Many of the interviewees (n = 16, 44%) related Kinship to their Bloodline.

> That's the bloodline. That's the one that keeps it all together because unless that kid feels a belonging to a community, their family that they're with, whether it be their carers or not, and still for that connection to mum and dad or whoever, aunty, uncle, whatever, that needs to be maintained and…. And that relationship, it's a hard one.
>
> (Benny, First Nations carer and community member)[11]

In this quote, Benny is able to express the need to have a continued connection and knowledge of one's First Nations bloodline, enabling belonging, during OOHC placement. This is significantly more important if the carer is not mob, First Nations or familiar to the community. In keeping these interrelations, the young person is assisted in accessing, understanding and connecting to all aspects of their culture whether that be their language group (mob)-specific culture, or a mixture of two or more cultures. It is important here to recognise the diversity of First Nations cultures, as First Nations children can belong to multiple communities. Benny also appreciates how this is difficult: he acknowledged the complexities of Kinship, noting that Kinship cannot be understood superficially as something that is necessarily automatic. Rather, the connection needs to be actively maintained.

This continued connection to Kinship through bloodlines was understood by Danielle, who found her placement to be calming and settling, *'well, I liked it because I was still with family. I wasn't with a completely different person. Like this person has the same bloodline as me and stuff. So, I felt okay there because it's family. And it was pretty good.'* (Danielle, First Nations Young Person previously in Kinship care with her First Nations Aunty).

Unfortunately, however, for other Aboriginal young people in OOHC, like Tammy, an Aboriginal young person who previously experienced foster care and multiple placements over 10 years of care, she was unable to answer the question *'What is Kinship'* stating *'I don't know'* in her response.

Similarly, Pauline and Helena, both experienced non-Aboriginal kinship carers, referred to Kinship as a placement. This can create a denial of the rich relationships and complexities of First Nations understandings of Kinship for those young people in non-Indigenous care.

5.1.1 | Kinship as culture and connection

Most interviewees (n = 32, 86%) referred to Kinship as being a necessity in one's Aboriginal culture, as this allows for an individual to know how they fit within that culture. In this way, Kinship was understood as fundamental. Benny has been scarred by the oversimplification of his Aboriginal culture within care. He observed that 'culture's not fucking sitting around making didgeridoos either, Culture and Kinship is about feeling connected'. As seen with Margaret, young people need to understand both sides of their family and not only be exposed to one, whether both sides are Aboriginal or only one side, because the young person needs to know the intricacies of their entire family.

> Because I think ultimately you want this [connection to culture]… You want these kids to be connected to their families, you know, and… Both families. I want ##### to be connected to my family but I need… He needs to know his mob.
>
> (Margaret, kinship carer and community member, Aunty of kid in care)

Participants articulated the numerous positive benefits derived from culture, such as an understanding of their place in family, community and mob which promotes belonging, and provided them with strength, engagement, linkages and individual roles in community. However, teenage males were especially mentioned several times in relation to the importance of understanding their culture and connection.

> So, probably the most affected ones that I've seen who have benefited from this move back towards culture, are probably the Year 8 boys. So, that's like your 13-, 14-year old boys. That's usually a period for them with their identity anyways, any teenager, but having that lack of culture and that, growing up they seem to be searching for something, and I see them getting pushed back towards culture rather than, you know, anti-social behaviour such as involvement in gangs or drugs and alcohol or that kind of stuff, is really beneficial for them.
>
> (Albert, Community Member, Aboriginal Education Officer)

Along with these benefits, more than half of participants (n = 22, 59%) spoke about the issues arising from cultural disconnection, as in the lack of culture and continued connection during OOHC.

> And, you know, when you see some kids that… A little Black kid who actually said she didn't like Aboriginal people, and that was a bit of a shock, and then I found out that they had made no attempt to find their mob…… And the sad thing is if we've got young ones that have been in the system for quite some time, they have no idea, the poor little fellas. But once they do find out [about their culture and connections], they're proud. But then, that's the sad thing, it's not just for the kids. The cultural planning and understanding Aboriginal things, the carers have got to know that too…… our kids are lost, our people are lost.
>
> (Barbara, ACCA Staff)

Five of the interviewees (17%) revealed a sense of the loss and searching when not engaged or connected to their culture whilst in care.

> Many of the kids that I deal with lose family connection once they get placed in the out-of-home care [system]. So, part of my role is to connect them back with culture and try to find those family links and get them back together.
>
> (Albert, Community Member, Aboriginal Education Officer)

5.1.2 | Kinship as country and belonging

Country, and being on Country, were discussed by nearly two-thirds of interviewees (n = 24, 65%). Participants reflected that keeping young people connected and within community, by allowing them to remain on country during their placement assisted in enabling 'belonging', 'custodianship' and 'relations with the land'.

> Mob. Family kinship is mob and on country. There's a lot of biggest mobs. You know, being with relatives. I suppose that's another way people put it, I suppose - relatives. Relatives but kinship is sort of like country too because we all belong. That's our belonging…, That's our country. Well, I don't know how other people say it but that's what I mean.
>
> (Barbara, ACCA Staff)

> Just like sense of belonging was the main thing. I knew where I belonged, on country, I knew where I came from, my country, I knew who I was. I wasn't questioning it at night. It didn't affect me. Like if it was the case where I didn't have a sense of belonging it would have affected my school life, all of that, because I wouldn't know. I would just question everything, like who am I, where am I from, who are my people, all that stuff.
>
> (Paula, Aboriginal Young Person previously in Kinship care with First Nations Grandmother)

> So, that's a big thing. If you take them out of country, take them away from family, don't give them a sense of belonging and custodianship, they're going to lose that. So, the only way to maintain that is to keep them on country.
>
> (Katie, non-Indigenous staff at an ACCA)

When discussing the ability to remain connected to country, particularly if a First Nations young person is off country and without mob during care, Aunty Shelly commented on the starkly different value systems of belonging and belongings of a materialistic and static manner. Aunty talks about the centrality of a genuine and deep connection to country, community and family and all that such a connection entails. This can be contrasted with Anglo-centric understandings, as evidenced in child protection and OOHC, where belonging is more narrowly defined.

> It can't [happen]. Not if they're in out-of-family out-of-home care. If the placement isn't with their Aboriginal family, that'll never happen because we don't want white people to teach our kids how to do our stuff? Fuck off. And I don't care how good they are. I've just had this discussion a couple of times just recently about this process and how, to me, best interests of the child when you put him in out-of-home care services is materialistic. In terms of a bed, a house and food. Our idea of that is different because ours is about belonging. And that [materials] doesn't teach a kid belonging. The other stuff with family and being around family and knowing who you are, knowing where you come from. And this is in the Bringing Them Home report where they talked about it was disconnected, their sense of belonging. They actually say, lost but I don't say lost because it's still down

> deep inside of us. The root and the sap is still flowing, we just need to find ways to draw it out…
>
> (Auntie Shelly)

Other interviewees felt that when young people were unable to remain on Country there was a positive need for more mandated requirements, including that the young person attend camps or spend time on Country. Ten of the interviewees (27%) spoke about taking young people in care to cultural camps on Country to assist in their continued connection and *'take them out on Country and show them how'*. The use of camps was found to be in practice for a number of young people who were in non-Aboriginal placements. Benny, Audrey and Aunty Patricia are from the same community and are close relations, who have developed and implemented regular cultural camps within their area for the Department and other non-government OOHC agencies.

> [Named service] provides a service to Family Community Services in regards to out-of-home care placements and non-placement service support, so all the old MPS (Hotel/Motel Stay Placements) and that. So, they do that. And we also run a cultural camp. So, we do probably three or four a year and the kids come. So, all the Koori kids around the thing that are in care that are not necessarily with Aboriginal people [during placement].[12] … So, it was done a bit differently, how we done it, and we created this little [Named service] family.
>
> (Benny, kinship carer and Community member)

> Well, the camps are… originally, I guess it started for keeping them in touch with their culture and keeping them connected and, you know, teaching them different things but now it's like a little culture of its own. [After the camps] You know, these kids are so connected, it's amazing. And they've got their own little network there now… So, yes, keeping them connected to their culture and country and learning about what that is, you know, especially for the kids that aren't in Aboriginal families.
>
> (Audrey, Aboriginal Health worker)

> And a couple of them said at camp… And we sort of sit around and have those yarns at camp, is sort of like how are they feeling, and they said they feel really embarrassed… because they know they're Black but they know nothing about their culture. The little kids at the camp sort of are picking up more easily, you know, the songs, the lingo and all that sort of stuff than what they were…
>
> (Aunty Patricia, Elder, Grandmother and Family member)

Country and belonging extends beyond human Kinship relationships to include relationships with land, animals and plants (McKay et al., 2009. p. 53). Ambelin Kwaymullina (2005), a Palyku woman from the Eastern Pilbara region, tells that country 'is self' and being interconnected to maintain Kinship. Similarly, in the British Columbian context, Bennett (2015), describes culture and country as 'the child or youth's right to experience stability and continuity of meaningful relationships with their family, extended family, community, and culture' (Bennett, 2015. p. 101). This definition highlights the importance of ongoing—and meaningful—relationships with family, community and country.

5.1.3 | Kinship as family ties

Almost all of the interviewees that commented on Kinship ($n = 35$, 94%), focused on family and how there is a raft of people that are and can be a part of an individual's Kinship network.

> Kinship would be placing that child with a relation, be it an aunt, an uncle, grandmother, brother, sister and having that child placed in their care whilst they've being removed and for them to live with and grow up.
>
> (Janette, Non-Indigenous Case Manager at an ACCA)

> [Kinship is] Your family. Everything. It's where you belong, it's where you fit in and who you are. It's everything.
>
> (Audrey, Aboriginal Health worker)

Albert is also able to articulate that there are variations and differences in people's thoughts around who is involved in Kinship, involving non-blood relations or same language groups or same geographical town relations. This is in clear contrast to colonial Australia which does not have the constructs, and therefore the language, to articulate, understand or validate family in the way it is understood by First Nations peoples:

> Kinship is family… But it doesn't necessarily have to be blood. It can be extended family, you know, cousins, aunties, uncles, all that perspective. It would be, you know, second, third, fourth cousin's kind of thing, to Aboriginal people. It can be as simple as they're the same language group as you, they're from the same town/region/area, that kind of thing. So, it doesn't have to just be blood in a lot of the cases.
>
> (Albert, Community Member and Aboriginal Education Officer)

For Libby, the disconnection from family and community during placement was seen to have wider ramifications. *'Family. Community. We'd all be done without family, I think. Without family we lose our identity, we lose our connection. Yes, family's priority, I think'*. (Libby, Community Member and Aboriginal Education Officer).

Family (immediate or extended) is central for Aboriginal people, this has the ability to define identity and assist with understanding Kinship ties and the land (Dudgeon et al., 2010. p. 26). Aboriginal communities have and continue to rear children within a collective environment, sharing parenting responsibilities and roles across the Kinship system. Participants in this study reflect these collective and relational ways of raising children and the need for these practices to remain relevant and strong.

5.1.4 | Kinship as identity

Many interviewees (n = 14, 39%) also commented that Kinship is part of their personal identity and through understanding Kinship they are able to understand their own identity. For Bradley, he is able to express that this identity is intrinsic and that, as an Aboriginal person, the identity is there, is relational and needs to be developed.

> [Kinship] It's belonging and knowing, that's your mob, and that's who you are, where you come from. Yes, and that's important. You know, as Aboriginal people we're already born with our identity, so you know, we've got to have those people around us because that's what builds us up to be, you know, strong people.
>
> (Bradley, Aboriginal Young Person previously in Kinship care with First Nations Grandmother)

One further consideration by Anthony was to not allow systems or individuals to force or identify for young people, however, provide them with the information needed and opportunities to make decisions for themselves if and when they are ready, without being imposed.

> Because we've had children who are Aboriginal, who don't want to identify with their Aboriginality, but if they're still strong and they've at least been given the right information so that they can access it when they're ready or are aware of what supports are out there to help them through this time when they leave us, … And they would know where or how to access support …
>
> (Anthony, Case manager, ACCA staff)

Camilla questioned how young people in care can function when they are not supported or informed of their identity. She said, *'How are you going to fill somebody's life if they still don't know who they are? It seems like it's just a dream'*. She talks of the presence of the old people (Ancestors) that these young people feel and are not able to articulate, *'I know that someone was there, and they are with me and now why does that keep coming back? Because those memories never leave us'*. (Camilla, Aboriginal Cultural manager and Community member). This fortunate connection through the ancestors allows for individuals to remain connected across their life's journey.

5.1.5 | One of the lucky ones

Discussions with young people who had previously lived in OOHC highlighted the importance of not only kinship care, but placement with Aboriginal family as critical. Young people with a lived experience of OOHC referred to those who were placed with Aboriginal family as being one of the lucky ones. Being in these placements was seen to be a luck of the draw. Bradley stated that he considered himself one of the 'lucky ones', when talking about his previous chats with other young people in care.

> Yes, so I was put in officially the care of my aunty, but because she was a carer, my nan, it happened that, you know, I lived with them all. Yes, so I was in kinship care, I'll say I'm one of the lucky ones that got to be put with family [Aboriginal family]. And especially because, like, having Nan as a young person, probably made my experience a little bit better in the system I think, because who knows where I would have ended up if I didn't have Nan.
>
> (Bradley, First Nations Young Person previously in Kinship care with First Nations Grandmother)

Similarly, Paula noted:

> Family connection, country, support, sense of belonging. If I'd gone with another family I wouldn't… Like where do I belong, what sort of purpose sort of thing. I'd just question it all the time where in kinship you don't. I just say okay there's my mum and this is my family, yes. So, it's cool, yes, kinship's good. Family support, connection to country, culture, all that sort of stuff.
>
> (Paula, First Nations Young Person in Kinship care with First Nations Grandmother)

Danielle found the networks and connections that she gained through placement with her First Nations Aunty extremely beneficial.

Interviewer: So, did you know your Aunty before…?

Dannielle: No, I didn't. I didn't know much of my Aboriginal family back then before I was (re) moved to my Aunty…. And then since I moved with my Aunty I've met so much of my family

now. And have gotten more family along the way.I feel like if I wasn't with a person that wasn't my family and wasn't around cultural stuff like, I wouldn't grow up knowing my own heritage, my background, all these. Like I loved when we used to tell dreamtime stories, I just loved growing up with all the elders and they have a fire and we'll just sit around camping and stuff. And I feel like if I was not with that I wouldn't understand that appropriation and all that stuff. (Danielle, Aboriginal Young Person previously in Kinship care with Aboriginal Aunty)

Kait, a young First Nations person who was placed in non-relative foster care and experienced multiple placements, found it difficult to discuss culture, kinship and her experiences.

Interviewer: What is kinship to you?

Kait: That question was in the survey and I didn't answer it.

Interviewer: Have you heard the word, kinship?

Kait: No.

5.2 | Kinship is (mis)understood and (mis)applied within the OOHC system

In discussing the notion of Kinship with all participants, fourteen (38%) participants discussed how Kinship is misunderstood and poorly applied in OOHC. Due to this there was *Confusion*, with kinship being something else entirely, that was *'not our word'*, and varied in agencies and placements, which was significantly amplified in the *non-Indigenous placements*. The following will address the participants voices and understandings.

5.2.1 | Confusion in understanding kinship

Out of the three non-Aboriginal kinship carers interviewed, Pauline and Helena were both non-Indigenous single parents with no previous Kinship connection to the young people in their care. When discussing Kinship generally, they both had a superficial understanding of kinship, initially thinking Kinship was a placement type,

Interviewer: What is kinship to you?

Pauline: Well, kinship care is a placement with somebody who the family recognizes as being Kin, so I don't think that necessarily has to be a relative. Often it is, but I think also if there's somebody that is well-known, liked and also part of the Aboriginal family, even if they're not Aboriginal, I think that's still… That person could be considered a kinship person. (Pauline, non-Indigenous kinship carer)

Pauline, was able to convey linkages across kinship, however, is still uncertain and presumptive. Similarly, Helena who knew of the family of the children she now cares for through working as a nurse at the local hospital, was also designated by the department as a kinship carer. However, she did not feel she was of Kinship to these young people in her care and should not have been viewed that way as she was not related, only establishing the department's ability to misappropriate, misplace and create confusion.

Interviewer: What is kinship to you?

Helen: Another fancy word for a carer. A kinship carer is meant to be somebody who's actually meant to be related to them, but it's not like that. A kinship carer is somebody who is related to them, in DoCS' [Department of Community Services (Child Protection)] eyes, or somebody who knew them or knows them. They tried for me as a kinship carer, but I'm not officially related.

Interviewer: So, this is a kinship placement?

Helen: Well, they call it that, but I'm not, because I'm not family at all, in any relationship at all, I'm not family. Do I know the family very well? Yes, but I'm not family. But they call it kinship care, because that's the way they put it through court, because of the arguments, you know what I mean, but I think kinship care is meant to mean that they are officially family, it's got to be a blood relation. (Helena, non-Indigenous kinship carer, no relation to kids)

However for Michelle, a non-Indigenous carer with a First Nations partner Kinship was oriented to Family.

> Well, family, anyone that's related to the kid or has a significant like, you know, has a role in the kid's life, means something to them, I would class that as Kinship. (Michelle, non-Indigenous kinship carer and community member)

Across colonial Australian society, including its departments, there is a lack of understanding of the culturally bound protocols, like kinship, and how these are only able to be transferred from Elders and Kin, and it is vital First Nation young people are offered time and space on country, with Elders and Kin as part of these protocols. The broad and simplistic presumptions in culture or superficial engagement for children in OOHC, will have further implications for the First Nations child and/or young person's culture and connection, as they are not allowed to access culture, they are presented with something else entirely within the colonial system.

5.2.2 | 'It is not our word'

Several interviewees ($n = 8$, 22%) identified the use of the word Kinship to be westernised and lacking in the appropriate meaning for First Nations communities, with this theme derived from one of the interviewee's own words to describe Kinship. The word Kinship and its meaning is oversimplified to suit administrative requirements. Albert, a First Nations man and Aboriginal Education Officer, who works with a lot of young people in care, talked about how *'kinship is now just a word, for me…. how it's used by departments and agencies, is not blakfella way, meaning a young person is connected or with mob, it's been twisted….'* This has led to a bastardisation within the OOHC system and in the broader settler-colonial society, leaving a representation of kinship and culture that is overly simplistic.

As Aunty Shelly, a significant Elder, Aunty, Grandmother, Activist and previous child protection worker, argues, *Kinship* has been used superficially and against First Nations people, to place young people not with their Aboriginal family. In her experience, 'kinship' placements tended to go with the non-Aboriginal side of the family, which is legally considered Kinship, however, does not engage or immerse the young person in culture.

Interviewer: So, what is Kinship to you?

Aunty Shelley: Kinship's a funny word and they used this against us in a court-ordered decision to place the kids in the care of the minister because we were told that everybody related to this child

is of kinship. So, there was a white family related to this kid. It's classified [that] they followed the Aboriginal placement principle because they place the child in the kinship placement. So, kinship is not our word even though we think it is. It is not our word. That's why we impress family. Family, family, Aboriginal family…

Interviewer: And do you consider Kinship to be the same for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people?

Aunty Shelley: No, I don't. Like I just said, the word kinship does not just relate to us. And I actually went around and asked people after this was used in the court documents that it was a kinship placement, because they were placed with the white grandparent who had nothing to do with them before this time. And I went around asking people and I said, kinship, who's word's that? And they go, our word. It's us. We're kin. I said, no we're not. Everybody related to these kids is. And they can place them with a distant cousin on the white side and that is a kinship placement. (Aunty Shelly, Elder, Grandmother and family member)

Furthermore, Aunty Pat expressed her thoughts around the interpretation of Kinship within placements, like Aunty Shelly, it is currently within placements considered too broad and simplistic.

> Do non-Aboriginal people really have Kinship? I can see that shift with FACS and when you're talking about the placement principles that shift, that are very broad, now this is kinship but… I think that it might be different in different communities. What people view and my view… There's got to be a connection somewhere to be part of that Kinship, you know, your Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal extended family and stuff. If my grandkids were taken, I wouldn't want them just placed with anybody but if you knew that they were a part of that Kinship… And I think that white fellows currently determine what Kinship is and like more in the department.
>
> (Aunty Patricia, Elder, Grandmother and family member)

5.2.3 | Agency, placement and carers

There was an overwhelming understanding by participants ($n = 28$, 76%) that there is significant difficulty for a First Nations child and/or young person to remain connected to their culture if they are not placed with and/or around their mob. As the placements are systematically marketed out, rather than personally engaging community, who are the people that best know them and their connections. In the non-Indigenous placement and carers discussions there were themes of colourism, lack of cultural understanding/ engagement and frustration at non-Indigenous carers' inability to engage community.

> We had a kid, a ##-year old kid [in our community] on our camp, that was as black as the ace of spades and one minute he was like, "look at all the Aboriginals". I was like, have you looked in the mirror. He's with a white… He's with an older white couple that were in their ##s and they were talking about Aboriginal people and the way that he was talking about them was like he wasn't black himself. But if they have been brought up in the Anglo world, you believe you're Anglo. So, dealing with the cultural needs, it's going to be hard. They're going to struggle with their own identity years later unless they do something younger to prevent that.
>
> (Benny, kinship carer and Community member)

Being removed from community and not connected during their placement included loss of understanding in culture which was discussed at length with Daisy.

> They don't learn culture, none of it. They lose it. You know, bad enough we don't know it much, you know, a little only, you know, going away to another community with white fellas and not even learning your culture, that is sad. That is sad. Knowing who they really are.
>
> (Daisy, Aboriginal Education Officer and Community member)

The levels of engagement with First Nations culture was said to be different across the varied designated agencies state-wide (n = 23, 62%), including what provider the young person was placed through (ACCAs, mainstream agencies or departmental care). The participant groups stated this variation came down to if they were a black or white agency, the training and engagement of carers and caseworkers around culture, and the basic and vague requirements of accreditation. Ashley voiced her concerns at the over simplification of culture, and cultural connection, across OOHC agencies.

> It depends on where the kids are at [which designated agency]. Half these agencies and carers didn't even know what a smoking ceremony was, until we did it. I know that's, not what everyone's going to experience as an Aboriginal person, but… There's more to the community than they think. It's more than a NAIDOC week, and that's all these agencies go to.
>
> (Ashley, Manager, Permanency Support Program with ACCA)

There was also a number (n = 8, 22%) of interviewees that spoke about non-Indigenous carers actively seeking out First Nations children to care for, as stated by Frank:

> Oh, I don't reckon it's right because there's a bit of things and there's a lot of people out there that are really racist and sometimes I don't know why they look for Aboriginal kids in care. I know someone who's been there and been really hurt by that experience.
>
> (Frank, kinship carer and Community member)

The ability to seek out First Nations children was detailed by Trevor, as he has experienced Frist Nations children and young people being marketed out to non-government OOHC organisations and their carers:

> So, when the child's removed and the FACS are looking for a place for the kid to go they'll basically put out to say, look we've just removed a 14-year-old Aboriginal girl, we need a carer. And that goes out to everyone, all agencies and it turns into a, first in gets the child sort of thing.
>
> (Trevor, kinship carer and foster care co-ordinator with ACCA)

However, when these First Nations children are going to non-Indigenous placement, even if they are kinship placements, communities are expected to fulfil their cultural connection. As for Helen, she felt she had exhausted all options for the First Nations children in her care and the local Aboriginal community, to a point where she now is not going to *'run after it'*:

> ***Helen:*** So, if Aboriginal people want to keep Aboriginals in the culture, it's very simple, make sure you open the door for the younger generation, because the younger generation are going to be the older generation in time to come. And here's the thing about this, if you kick a dog enough times, the dog will never come near. If you keep kicking that dog, it will never come near you, never, it will die in the corner of that yard.
>
> ***Interviewer:*** So, how do you see the way forward for your two girls now, in terms of their Aboriginality?

> ***Helen:*** I don't see anything, I just see whatever I, whatever opportunity comes my way, I'll take them to it. But as for running after the Aboriginal community, no, I'm done and dusted with it, I've tried, I've done my best. I'm not chasing my tail. (Helena, non-Indigenous kinship carer)

Helen, who is non-Indigenous and not related to the children, through her disassociation, lack of information or links to First Nations people and community, shows the difficulties and complexities of not being able to engage and connect when caring for First Nations children in non-Indigenous placements. This in turn causes a secondary removal from family and culture, through little immersion and knowledge, having implications for the identity of the young people in care.

6 | DISCUSSION

Understandings of Kinship and the role it plays within an individual's life were rich and varied, with participants' insights perhaps only touching on the complexities of Kinship. Participants highlighted the difficulties in ensuring that First Nations children and young people remain connected to their culture and Kinship when removed from parents, mob and placed in OOHC. Individual interpretations of Kinship for participants focused on common areas of culture, connections, Country, belonging, identity and most frequently family and community. Children and young people should have the right to access their culture or even the opportunity to access it, no matter the situation or placement type (UNCRC, 1989). However, the right to access culture is complicated when departmental and legal notions of kinship care are conflated with First Nations understandings of Kinship. There is the continued removal and disconnection of First Nations young people into OOHC and the false assumption that kinship care is going to address the needs of the young person. The continuation of culture requires a highly individualised approach, where Kinship and culture become part of an ongoing journey, which needs to be tailored to the individual child or young person with support and active engagement from all parts of their Kinship network, most importantly Elders and First Nations community. There is the understanding of the over-representation of First Nation people involvement in OOHC and the general consensus about the need for First Nations children and young people in care to be able to actively immerse themselves in all dimensions of Kinship, engage in understanding from First Nations community and cultural perspectives, as they are all interconnected. If one aspect of this interconnected and relational way of being is severed there is ongoing loss and disconnection.

Through the narratives of the participants, First Nations and non-Indigenous, a wide-range of understanding of Kinship has been shown, leading to confusion for those engaged and provides examples of the misleading language in an imposed western system of OOHC. In regards to kinship care as a placement, one might easily mistake it as having First Nations origins, and so covering the complex cultural needs implied. To remedy this, there is a need for placements to (1) be reviewed and understood, removing the conflation of relative and kinship in reporting, (2) be representative of cultural practices within the specific first nation group, (3) address the focus of keeping children and young people connected to culture and (4) be regularly accessible by Elders or First Nations community to ensure the ongoing connection, regardless of the designated agency. In doing so, there will be genuine engagement of First Nations community in rearing their children during care, allowing for legitimate steps towards self-determination. Having young people feel that they are 'lucky' to have been placed with their mob needs to be addressed. As discussed in this paper, non-Indigenous placements, even within Kinship and/or kinship placements can lead to significant identity and connection problems for the young person and carer. This is highlighted in this research for example with the children looked after by Helen, and in the challenges of learning about identity and Kinship expressed by participants when it was not part of their day-to-day life. This is further complicated by the fact that cultural planning, with static documents, cannot replace being with First Nations family and mob. Furthermore, in various jurisdictions, cultural plans are developed by child protection practitioners within the department or agencies—many individuals are not themselves First Nations people and therefore these

cultural plans are not just static, they are simplistic and often, highly inappropriate. The results of this study demonstrated that due to this oversight during the implementation of western terminology in the colonial OOHC system and how it currently operates, specifically defining Kinship, there is limited understanding and genuine connection for First Nations young people in care. This leaves First Nations young people with weaker connection to their Kinship, First Nations family and community due to their OOHC placement.

The recent *Family is Culture* Report (FIC) 2019, has again brought to light that non-Indigenous, mainstream agencies and the departments do not understand First Nations culture and kinship (Davis, 2019. p. 218). Historically, the ATSICPP solely included the 'placement principle', premised on the desire to ensure that 'government intervention into [Aboriginal] family life does not disconnect [Aboriginal] children from their [Aboriginal] family and culture' (Tilbury, 2013 p. 2). In doing so, there needs to be more community-based solutions at grass-roots, not at the systems level, placing the decisions with Elders and First Nations community (Behrendt, 2003 p. 146). Implementing policy to allow First Nations community to decide who the young people's kinship group and placements should and do include, will encourage genuine continuation, connection and diversity across communities, which is vitally important (Krakouer et al., 2018; Krakouer et al., 2022). This will not only allow First Nations community to care for their children, but ensure that placements are genuinely recognised by the First Nations community as per the Indigenous placement principle.

Finally, as understood by First Nations communities, Elders 'pass on the traditions of their people from generation to generation and accordingly their role is strengthened and their position more respected as they get older. Their opinions are sought after, listened to and heeded' (Bourke, 1993, p. 4). To allow for a First Nations young person to continue their cultural journey once removed, Elders and specific community members from the young person's mob need to be engaged to allow for the young persons and the communities cultural continuation. The complexities of Kinship and continuation of one's culture are not able to be captured within a placement, or within one nuclear family grouping, or through simply 'opening a door' for non-Indigenous carers. As this paper has shown, kinship is used simplistically, and merged with western terminology and language about kinship, in OOHC policy and practice with respect to First Nations children in NSW, Australia.

7 | CONCLUSION

The discussion and ideas around Kinship and its use within the OOHC sector, has shown Kinship to be fundamental, yet complex and critical for First Nations people and the development of our young ones. Kinship encapsulates a complex network of relationality, cultural connections, Country, belonging, identity and family. However, these complexities are currently getting lost, blurred and even bastardised, during its use by various departments and the implementation of kinship care into practice, further removing First Nations young people from their culture and human rights. There is a circumvention of cultural connection in the placements of these young people even when they comply with the ATSICPP hierarchy, as they are usually not adhering to community, our Elders and the young person's cultural needs and human rights. Kinship is being simplified in OOHC contexts where, problematically, Kinship is equated with kinship care, which cannot account for, nor respond to, the complexity of extended First Nations family relationships, laws and connection. Kinship is essential for identity, belonging, culture—all of which are important for the child and the community in terms of well-being and cultural connection. However, when the complexity of Kinship is erased through conflation with kinship care, which includes a very broad (non-Indigenous) understanding of who is considered kin and who the child or young person should be cared for during their OOHC placement. First Nations children are not able to learn how to navigate the world, as a First Nations person, immersed in their Kinship, with their connection, relationality, responsibilities and obligations. This inappropriate paternalistic control of placements, void of First Nations community involvement, has historical resonance with the Stolen Generations. As the contemporary child protection and OOHC

policies are not being followed adequately, practices are not engaging First Nations communities and the decisions on placements are not including mob, thus continuing the colonial legacy of assimilation and the cultural genocide of First Nations people in so-called Australia.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JCB carried out the research and wrote the manuscript.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The term 'First Nations' is used in this paper to refer to First Nation groups across colonial Australia or where possible the specific identified nations. In this research there were 32 First Nations participants interviewed for the research, with no Torres Strait Islander participants. The terms Aboriginal, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, is used to refer to First Nations peoples specifically from Australia, where used by the participants in the data or the literature.

[2] 'Mob' is a colloquial term used in Australia to identify a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place, region or country. It is used to connect and identify who an Aboriginal person is and where they are from. Mob can represent your family group, clan group or wider Aboriginal community group. See Deadly Story, https://www.deadlystory.com/page/tools/aboriginal-cultural-support-planning/cultural-planning---frequently-asked-questions/what-is-the-difference-between-mob-clan-tribe-language-group

[3] A First Nations *Elder* is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and law. They have been given and are able to give the permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. For more information see Elkin, A. P. (1994). *Aboriginal men of high degree: initiation and sorcery in the world's oldest tradition*. Kacha, S. (2011). *Walk with us: Aboriginal Elders call out to Australian people to walk with them in their quest for justice / [edited by Sabien Kacha]*.

[4] NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec), or commonly referred to as AbSec, is a not-for-profit incorporated Aboriginal controlled organisation. AbSec are the NSW Aboriginal child and family peak organisation, working to empower Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities impacted by the child protection system, as well as support a quality Aboriginal community-controlled child and family sector to deliver needed supports in Aboriginal communities across the state. https://www.absec.org.au/about.html

[5] There is limited research about for-profit agencies in NSW, for more information see Davis, M. (2019). *Family is Culture: Independent review into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care in New South Wales* pp 113; Libesman, T. (2018). Human Rights and Neoliberal Wrongs in the Indigenous Child Welfare Space. In: Hendry, J., Tatum, M., Jorgensen, M., Howard-Wagner, D. (eds) Indigenous Justice. Palgrave Socio-Legal Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

[6] Residential care is an option used for children or young people with specific high needs or multiple placement breakdowns, where the system has produced so much trauma for the child or young person that they are then only able to be cared for by a team of people, rather than an individual carer or couple.

[7] Family & Community Services. 2020. *About relative and kinship care*. [online] Available at: https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/carers/about-relative-and-kinship-care [Accessed 16 June 2020].

[8] **Section 13- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Young Person Placement Principles**

(1) **The general order for placement** Subject to the objects in section 8 and the principles in section 9, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person who needs to be placed in statutory out-of-home care is to be placed with—

(a) a member of the child's or young person's extended family or **kinship** group, as recognised by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to which the child or young person belongs, or

(b) if it is not practicable for the child or young person to be placed in accordance with paragraph (a) or it would not be in the best interests of the child or young person to be so placed—a member of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to which the child or young person belongs, or

(c) if it is not practicable for the child or young person to be placed in accordance with paragraph (a) or (b) or it would not be in the best interests of the child or young person to be so placed—a member of some other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family residing in the vicinity of the child's or young person's usual place of residence, or

(d) if it is not practicable for the child or young person to be placed in accordance with paragraph (a), (b) or (c) or it would be detrimental to the safety, welfare and well-being of the child or young person to be so placed—a suitable person approved by the Secretary after consultation with—

(i) members of the child's or young person's extended family or **kinship** group, as recognised by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to which the child or young person belongs, and

(ii) such Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations as are appropriate to the child or young person.

[9] In the *Bringing them Home* report, in reference to the 'Indigenous Child Placement Principle' (now known as the placement element of the ATSCIPP), recommendation 51b states that: "Placement is to be made according to the following order of preference, 1. placement with a member of the child's family (as defined by local custom and practice) in the correct relationship to the child in accordance with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander law, 2. placement with a member of the child's community in a relationship of responsibility for the child according to local custom and practice, 3. placement with another member of the child's community, 4. placement with another Indigenous carer." (HREOC, 1997, pp. 516–17)

[10] A number of the First Nations participants identified themselves with a number of racial backgrounds, and therefore accessing and understanding all cultural grounds is significant. There is the acknowledging, a child born of one First Nations parent and another non-Indigenous parent might have connections to multiple cultures—African, Pasifika, European, Asian and the many cultures within these—depending on the other parent.

[11] Kinship is an inherently complex concept, specifically within Australia and the legacy of invasion and miscegenation within Aboriginal people even further amplifies the complexities. For a deeper account please refer to Bronwyn Carlson (2016) Politics of Individual Identity.

[12] The use of the term *Koori* is in reference to an Aboriginal Person from the colonial state of NSW, amalgamating all language groups. UNSW (1996) "Using the right words: appropriate terminology for Indigenous Australian studies", in *Teaching the Teachers: Indigenous Australian Studies for Primary Pre-Service Teacher Education*, School of Teacher Education, University of New South Wales. https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/indigenous-terminology

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APPENDIX A

Interview participants

Participant group	Pseudonyms	Additional identified involvement	Interviewee no.	Age range	Known First Nations group and Aboriginality
Young people (YP)	Tammy	FM	(1)	18–25	Unsure—Yes
	Paula	FM	(23)	18–25	Yes—Yes
	Danielle	FM	(25)	18–25	Yes—Yes
	Kait	FM	(27)	18–25	Unsure—Yes
	Bradley	FM	(30)	18–25	Yes—Yes
Parents (P)	Marcia	YP	(6)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Alan	CM	(29)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Brooke	FM	(32)	25–40	Non-Indigenous
Family members (FM)	Ali	CM	(7)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Aunty Patricia	Carer	(19)	65+	Yes—Yes
	Aunty Shelly	Previous AS	(20)	65+	Yes—Yes
Community members (CM)	Albert	FM	(3)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Libby	FM	(10)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Sally	FM	(12)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Audrey	Nil	(14)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Daisy	Nil	(16)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Camilla	CM	(17)	40–65	Yes—Yes
Carers (C) and Guardians (G)	Blanche	CM	(2)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Benny	CM	(8)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Margaret	CM	(9)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Sue	CM	(18)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Trevor	AS/CM	(21)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Pauline	NIL	(22)	40–65	Non-Indigenous
	Frank	CM	(26)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Jim	FM	(28)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Irene	FM	(31)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Helena	NIL	(35)	40–65	Non-Indigenous
	Bridgette	AS/CM/FM	(36)	40–65	Yes—Yes
OOHC Agency staff (AS)- Departmental and non-government (ACCAs and mainstream)	Janette	YP	(4)	25–40	Non-Indigenous
	Michelle	Carer	(5)	25–40	Non-Indigenous
	Barbara	CM	(11)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Dianna	Nil	(13)	65+	Yes—Yes
	Charlotte	FM, CM	(15)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Anthony	FM, CM	(24)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Katie	FM, CM	(33)	40–65	Yes—Yes
	Ashley	FM, CM	(34)	25–40	Yes—Yes
	Coral	Carer/CM/FM	(37)	40–65	Yes—Yes
					Yes—Yes

Note: $N = 37$ - First Nations = 32 Non-Indigenous = 5.