

Case Study

Vicky Peters

**Aboriginal Liaison Worker
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Co-located worker with Connections**

Connections has a strong commitment to develop culturally appropriate services that are guided by the Aboriginal community. We have forged partnerships to ensure that we are improving our understanding and work with Aboriginal families.

Part of this work has included a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) worker co-located with Connections. Aboriginal Liaison Worker, Vicky Peters shares with us her reflections on the relationship with Connections.



VICKY PETERS

What do you think of the co-location arrangement with VACCA and Connections?

I think the co-location arrangement has worked very successfully, particularly when the Community Based Child Protection Team Leaders and VACCA have both been on hand to provide advice and have been readily available for consultation in the same location. I also think the co-location arrangement has been very important in building relationships within the Alliance [of organisations that share work in this catchment]. I have also had calls from different programs within Connections mainly accessing my specialist knowledge regarding the Aboriginal Services Sector, programs and funding available to assist families.

Due to the welcoming atmosphere and the great bunch of people at the Connections Blackburn office it has been great working from there – it has also been convenient as VACCA does not have an office in the East.

Could you explain the importance of having an Aboriginal Liaison Worker?

Due to historical government policies regarding the removal of Aboriginal children there is a real fear amongst the Aboriginal community regarding mainstream welfare organisations and Child Protection. My role has been important in breaking down some of those barriers and I have been able to advise mainstream workers on how best to engage these vulnerable families and provide knowledge of what Aboriginal specific services, programs and funding is available help support those families.

Can you tell us the key focus of your work?

To me the key focus of my role has been building successful relationships within the Alliance. I have done a lot of networking in both the Inner and Outer East to gain a sound knowledge of programs, funding and services available to the Aboriginal community which has been invaluable when making recommendations. Equally important has been my co-work with mainstream workers to help connect with families that have sometimes been difficult to engage.

What are the most challenging aspects of your role?

I think the most challenging aspect of my role has been the isolation that I have sometimes felt with being the only Aboriginal person working out of mainstream offices, fortunately that was made a lot easier by the great bunch of staff I worked with out of the Blackburn office. As my role was fairly new in the East another challenging aspect was getting the message out there that a consult needed to occur with any Aboriginal family that was referred into Child FIRST.

I'm pleased to say that these processes are now fluid and I am sure that the mainstream service sector has come to think of it as a valid and important part of the process. As part of my role, over 500 consultations have occurred in 12 months for both the Inner and Outer East Child FIRST regions.

Connections UnitingCare is a community organisation with a long and proud history of supporting marginalised and disadvantaged people. We offer a range of services across a continuum of care from preschool and childcare through to counselling and in-home support. We provide innovative and early intervention programs that support children, young people and their families giving them a better chance in life now and in the future.

For more information visit www.connections.org.au

Case Study – Vicky Peters (cont'd)

Can you reflect on your work with Connections...

I have now worked out of both Blackburn and Croydon Connections' offices and have found both sites to be staffed with some wonderful, friendly people and they have made my time there easy and enjoyable. I am also pleased to note that as an organisation Connections have rolled out cultural competency training for staff which is invaluable when working and understanding the issues faced by vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.

Why is Connections interested in a co-location arrangement?

Connections has a strong commitment to Aboriginal people and their community. We are actively working to develop culturally appropriate services that are guided by the Aboriginal community.

We are forging and building partnerships to ensure that we are improving our understanding, responsiveness and work with Aboriginal families.

Connections is actively improving cultural awareness and competencies at all levels of the organisation from the Board of Governance, Senior Management and all staff.

As part of this we have...

- » developed the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) co-location arrangement creating an interface at Inner East Child FIRST and co-working of cases across the Eastern Region,
- » a part-time position based at the Dandenong & District Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd,
- » formed a partnership with Playgroup Victoria to run a Koori Playgroup at the Autumn Place Kindergarten in Doveton. This successful partnership has enabled Indigenous families attending the Koori playgroup to have access to and become familiar with a kindergarten environment,
- » a commitment to mutual learning and professional development exchange with Aboriginal organisations,
- » a commitment to provide ongoing cultural awareness training to staff and incorporate cultural competence as a core underpinning in our policy development and strategic planning,
- » an aim to develop linkages, improve understanding and professional practice and provide a reciprocal learning exchange that provides leadership and modeling of collaborative partnership relationships.

To find out more about the organisations we are working with to ensure that we develop culturally appropriate services that are guided by the Aboriginal community or to find out more on our work in this area, please go to www.connections.org.au/indigenous

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