



STOPPING ANOTHER STOLEN GENERATION

Reducing the number of Aboriginal children in out of home care

Working to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

There are thousands of young people in out of home care, and a disproportionate number are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Greens want to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering out of home care and provide better support for families, children and communities.

Tragically, although it has been decades since the Stolen Generation, and eight years since the National Apology, we are facing a repeat of past mistakes with a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people account for less than five per cent of all Australian children and young people, but account for almost 35 per cent of the out-of-home care population.¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged one to four are 11 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in out of home care.² We are in danger of creating another stolen generation and its associated intergenerational trauma.

The Greens are advocating for a system that actively invests in early intervention approaches that help to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from entering into out of home care in the first place. We need a system that focuses on early intervention and support for children and their families.

> THE INQUIRY INTO OUT OF HOME CARE

Over the course of a year, the Senate Community Affairs References Committee held an inquiry into out of home care. Hearings were held around Australia including two days in the Northern Territory, and the inquiry received more than a hundred submissions from community members, peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies, child support and other social services organisations, and a range of experts.

The 39 recommendations from the Committee provide clear options for how to improve the out of home care system.³ Despite receiving the report in 2015, the Government has not provided a formal response to the recommendations before calling the election. The Greens will work to implement the inquiry's recommendations to bring meaningful change, reduce

numbers going into care and improve outcomes for children and young people in out of home care.

> FEWER ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN GOING INTO OUT OF HOME CARE

Far too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are ending up in the out of home care system. We must improve the supports that are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, young people and their communities. The Greens will **provide \$20m over four years for projects to reduce the number of children entering out of home care**, by:

- **Developing early intervention approaches** that effectively support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families at risk of entering the out of home care system, including providing Aboriginal family support workers. This will ensure that vulnerable families receive the support they need.
- **Identifying ways to improve participation of Aboriginal children and young people in decision making where appropriate**, including before entering into care. This will help work to reduce the rate of entry into out of home care.
- **Building the capacity of Aboriginal community controlled agencies to provide support for Aboriginal families and young people**, including training support workers, providing family support services, and early intervention support. Better support for families and young people will reduce the number of young people going into out of home care. Working with peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations will ensure support meets the real needs of communities on the ground.
- **Developing cultural competence training** for all services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. This will ensure that service providers have a better understanding of

¹ Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Out of home care, Recommendations](#), 19 August 2015, p.10.

² [ABC Fact Check](#), April 2016.

³ Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Out of home care, Recommendations](#), 19 August 2015.

cultural strengths and community supports that may be available.

> IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

There is clear evidence of the specific challenges that face Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the need for responses that recognise the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care said that:

*For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are placed in out of home care outside of their families and communities, efforts to support and maintain connections are especially vital to their ongoing wellbeing and safety.*⁴

Current Commonwealth, state and territory frameworks do not do enough to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to maintain strong links to their communities. As one witness told the inquiry:

*The biggest thing—just as much for me back then as for a seven-year-old child in care now—is to be able to walk down the street and when someone sees you and says 'Hey sis' or 'Hey cuz', you know who they are and how you are connected to them. That gives a sense of belonging that no education, no upbringing—not even with a stable non-Aboriginal people, no matter how encouraging they have been to you—can give you. It helps you to become a whole person.*⁵

It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care have individualised cultural care plans.

A key barrier in providing appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their communities is a lack of cultural competence. One witness told the inquiry: *There are cultural strengths that exist in communities which sometimes maybe are not taken into account. Workers, without a lot of experience or cultural competency training, potentially are making decisions for families that do not go in their interest and do not recognise their strengths and potentially do not engage all of the supports and things required before a child is taken into care.*⁶

> IMPROVING THE OUT OF HOME CARE SYSTEM

The Greens will also work to implement the recommendations of the inquiry for improvements in the general out of home care system by **providing \$10 million over four years for projects to:**

- **Improve participation by children, young people and families in decision making processes**, including entry into care where appropriate, placement decisions,

family contact and re-union, transition points, and through dispute resolution measures.

- **Develop and implement nationally consistent powers for independent child commissioners and guardians**, by working with state and territory governments.
- **Developing nationally consistent mechanisms for managing complaints and investigating individual cases**, including through independent bodies.

The Greens will also **provide \$300,000 for a review of parental consent requirements for identity documents**, to remove barriers for children and young people in out of home care.

> SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRANSITIONS

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) was a \$1,000 payment established in 2003 to assist young people transitioning from out of home care. Since then it has only been increased once, in 2009, to \$1,500.⁷

The Greens will **double the TILA to \$3,000**, providing extra support for young people at a crucial transition point. The Parliamentary Budget Office has costed this change at **\$5.4 million over four years** (2016-17 to 2019-20).

> WORKING FOR A BETTER OUT OF HOME CARE SYSTEM

The Coalition did not provide a formal response to the inquiry's recommendations, and cuts to key social services have left vulnerable young people even worse off.

The Greens want to take action so that fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children go into out of home care. Implementing the recommendations of the out of home care inquiry will ensure that better approaches are in place to help vulnerable young people have access to the services that they need to get better life outcomes.

⁴ Senate Community Affairs References Committee, [Out of home care, Recommendations](#), 19 August 2015, p. 220.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 221.

⁷ Department of Social Services, [Review of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance](#), 2015, p. 1.