



SUMMARY SHEET

“I have to jump like a kangaroo ... I have to slither like a snake”. A qualitative evaluation of Elder-led art workshops in the child protection sector

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Background

In September 2024, the Elder Co-researchers led art workshops, titled *The Visual Art of Our Stories* with 45 agency workers to explore what they had learnt from our cultural training program during 2024. Participants were asked to explore their feelings about what was important to them working in the out-of-home care (OOHC) sector for Aboriginal children in non-Indigenous care arrangements. Participants were provided a 9"x12" canvas, acrylic paints and paint pens of a variety of colours, paintbrushes of varying size, lead pencils, erasers and A4 pieces of paper. At the conclusion of the workshops, the participants shared the stories of their artwork, for example:



There are human tracks, snake tracks, kangaroo tracks and the possum tracks, and coming into work some days I feel like I am walking through nicely, and some days I have to jump like a kangaroo, other days I have to slither like a snake. (Participant, AW1)

Four main themes were explored from the data collected: 1. Connecting to cultural knowledge holders, culture and the environment; 2. Connecting to kin and families; 3. Walking together, and 4. Hope: Imagining a different future.

Key Findings

- Aboriginal Elder and community-led arts-based approaches are well-suited for enhancing professional development, creating opportunities for expressing experiences that are complex and difficult, and for critical thinking and reflective practice.
- Forms of adult education that bring together Indigenous and Western perspectives such as the Elder-led arts-based work that has been undertaken, reflect traditional ways of intergenerational teaching, mentoring and storytelling that support self-determination and community empowerment.
- Elements of the environment and language were adopted by participants as a way to articulate feelings, and the challenges in working in the OOHC sector, showing how arts-based approaches offer opportunities for new ways of learning and thinking about this work.
- Arts-based approaches provide a novel way to support evaluation in professions where the work is complex and difficult.
- Providing a forum where collaboration and relationships can support mutual efforts for dissemination and activism, in complex areas of policy and practice that disproportionately and negatively affects our peoples and communities.
- Workshop participants were able to express through their artwork, and articulate through their stories, visions for change in their practices and different actions and potential pathways that navigate toward a mutually hoped-for future.