

“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 AND WHAT WE DID

The study’s Elder Co-Researchers, led art workshops, titled, The Visual Art of Our Stories with 45 out-of-home care agency workers to explore what they had learnt from our cultural training program, conducted during 2024.

Participants were provided with 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.

Four main themes were explored from the data: 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

- 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 Indigenous ways of intergenerational teaching, mentoring and storytelling that support self-determination and community empowerment.
- Arts-based approaches provide a novel way to support evaluation in professions where the work is complex and difficult.
- 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.
- Arts-based approaches provide a forum for collaboration and relationships that can support mutual efforts for dissemination and activism, in complex areas of policy and practice that disproportionately and negatively affect our peoples and communities.

ARTWORK AND STORIES

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.

In the middle, this is campfire, home, meetings, and this is the paths that go both ways, so some footprints are coming and some are going back, and I think for me, Aboriginal people always find their way back to home, and the footprints are little people, big people, all people, but some are walking alone, lost or coming back and then get together.

I drew the heart in the middle, because I do genuinely feel that everyone should care about all of this stuff. From the heart I went out in campfire colours, because I wanted the meeting from the heart, but also the campfire and the opportunity to share stories with each other, our carers to share their foster caring stories and to gain wisdom and to hear the stories from Elders and community. And for us all to come together and hold hands, and to support our children.

Mine is a piece about hope, so hope for reunification for our young people, or increased connection to land and country for the young people that we care for. So, you can see the sun rising here for the Aboriginal people and their families and then the rainbow that signifies the joy, the celebration of being connected and the dancing that goes with that.

