what is this research project about?

By asking practitioners, this qualitative research project aimed to better understand the key elements of promising bicultural practice in the Northern Territory (NT) children and families sector. Findings were used to inform the development of a two-way practice framework that can be used by a range of government and non-government organisations.

why is this research project important?

Parental substance misuse, mental health problems and domestic violence are described as “key risk factors” for child abuse and neglect that often occur together as part of a complex set of social and family issues. In the Northern Territory (NT) Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners are working together to support families experiencing these multifaceted issues. Developing effective working partnerships involves understanding the process of developing cultural competence as a ‘two-way street’.

who is involved?

This collaborative project was conducted as a partnership between the Centre for Child Development and Education (CCDE) at Menzies School of Health Research and SAF,T (meaning Strong Aboriginal Families, Together), the NT peak body for children, youth and families.

Organisations (six Aboriginal and three mainstream organisations) delivering services in remote, regional and urban settings across both the Top End and Central Australia were profiled. In total, 74 participants, including chief executive officers, human resource managers, operational managers and frontline practitioners were interviewed. Approximately half (48%) of these participants were Aboriginal.
### Governance and Leadership
- Meaningful membership and representation of Aboriginal people on organisational Board and/or Aboriginal Reference Group.
- Clear Constitution, Mission and Vision statements that reflect Aboriginal community values including cultural safety policies.
- Quality Assurance frameworks that regularly review targets and outcomes embedded in organisational structures.
- Strong links and accountability to local communities.
- Cohesive, culturally safe organisation.
- Improved quality of service for all clients.

### Recruitment and Training
- Documented practice model that key practitioner competencies can be linked to.
- Word of mouth recruitment effective alongside formal selection process.
- Job skills support for applicants during recruitment and selection phase.
- Cultural considerations when recruiting practitioners i.e. recommendation of elders: Aboriginal representative on selection panel.
- Practitioners can focus on direct work with children and families.
- Cohesive bicultural team.
- Promoting Aboriginal leadership.

### Operational Management
- Key role in negotiating mainstream systems and act as ‘buffer’ between practitioner and internal/external bureaucracy.
- Relevant professional discipline and demonstrable key personal attributes e.g. to model rather than teach.
- Support transition of Aboriginal practitioners into management roles.
- Culturally respected engagement of families i.e use of language.
- Consistency of service delivery for children and families.

### Co-working models
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners work in pairs to manage a shared case load, exchange knowledge and provide peer support.
- Bring together complementary skills and knowledge that are equally valued.
- Develop shared understandings of concepts relating to their practice.
- Knowledge of local Aboriginal customs and cultural diversity.
- Supportive working relationships.

### Cultural Safety
- Cultural consideration of gender, age, avoidance relationships, language.
- Establishment of cultural advisory group that is both proactive and reactive at a program level.
- Support transition of Aboriginal practitioners into management roles.
- Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Practitioner values congruent with two-way practice.
- Strengthening local workforce capacity.

### Reflective Practice
- Time and resourcing for regular, planned professional supervision individually and as a team to continuously reflect and improve practice.
- ‘Cultural’ supervision as part of professional supervision.
- Practitioners given choice to access external or clinical supervision.
- Awareness and access to therapeutic support for practitioner’s own healing.
- Prevent practitioner burnout.
- Increase staff retention.
- Continuous quality improvement in service delivery to children and families.

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**where can you get more information?**


A full copy of the report can be downloaded from the following websites:

CCDE: http://ccde.menzies.edu.au/  

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