



# Connection to Traditional Culture Framework Pilot

September 2020 - October 2021

Every child has the right to grow up with their family and community, healthy and safe. For First Nations people, our Culture keeps us healthy in mind, body, and spirit. Our Culture is nurtured within our families and communities. When governments enter our lives to remove our children from families, they also remove them from their community and their connection to Culture is interrupted. In Australia, our children are almost ten times more likely to be removed from families and placed in government out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children. In Western Australia this rate increases to 16.7 times more likely as recorded in 2020. The intergenerational cycle of First Nations child removal continues to be a blight on our nation.

The Connection to Traditional Culture Framework (CTCF / the Framework) was formally developed in 2018 by As One Nyitting Limited (AONL) in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia, by First Nations people, for First Nations people in response to child protection legislation, policy and practice that is failing us. The Framework ensures that children and families impacted by the child protection system have a pathway to maintain connection to Culture, improving the wellbeing of our people. The aims of CTCF are simple yet ambitious:

1. Our children are returned home to Family and Country;
2. Young leaders are nurtured in our communities; and
3. Our young people grow up strong in our Culture.

The Framework is the first of its kind in Australia that places the child at the centre of a united support network led by the Cultural authority of our Elders. The Framework includes an Elders Panel established on-Country in line with Cultural protocols, Family & Carers, a Family Champion, AONL and statutory government Agency, all with a responsibility for the wellbeing of the child. The Framework utilises a bespoke software developed by AONL that acts as a collaboration space for all participants and a Cultural safeguard for the child, providing transparency and accountability to the child, family, and agency. The CTCF software maps and tracks the child's journey and ensures all actions are aligned with the child's best interests and needs relative to where they are on their Cultural journey. The Framework, through the software and support network brings the child's voice to the forefront of all decisions that affect them.

The CTCF Pilot was run by AONL in collaboration with a Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) district over a 12-month period; commencing in September 2020 and concluding in October 2021 with publication of a report and findings to support the Framework's expansion into other Department districts in 2022. Seven families with twenty-two youth in out-of-home care were identified to take part in the Pilot along with Department case workers and team leaders. The circumstances of each family were diverse with the Framework responding to meet the unique needs of each family. The work of the Pilot included the convening of an Elders Panel on Country, extensive mapping of kinship connections, holistic Cultural support direct to families, and facilitation of connection to Country. The Pilot critically led to an early intervention that avoided removal of children by the Department.

CTCF is aligned with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the primary aims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. These instruments recognise the essential and inseparable role of First Nations families and communities in achieving the best interests and wellbeing of the child. The Framework provides a unique platform for First Nations self-determination that can be tailored to empower First Nations families and communities across Australia and in other jurisdictions around the world who are similarly over-represented in State run child protection systems.

To bring long term-change to a long-term challenge, solutions must arise from First Nation families and community to pave the way forward to build a future where every child is home with Mum, Dad, Brothers, Sisters, Cousins, Aunties, Uncle's, Nans, and Pops. It takes a community to raise a child, enabling the child to belong and identify, ensuring they understand their place and purpose as a First Nation Child. Culture is our way forward with the Connection to Traditional Culture Framework the vehicle to drive our children home.