

HELPING YOUR SERVICE TO SUPPORT THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN



KidsMatter, in collaboration with a group of highly regarded Aboriginal cultural consultants, has developed a series of powerful and emotional animations and guidance resources for early childhood services to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

The animations provide a rich resource for early childhood services to use with children and their families, as well as in staff professional development. “It’s very important for non-Indigenous educators to expand their knowledge of Indigenous culture, and the animations will give them a very good base to start from”, said Rachael McBrien, an early childhood educator who was involved in the project.

There are twelve animations, which have been created to communicate key messages about resilience, the importance of adults taking care of themselves and cultural identity. They depict everyday interactions in the lives of children and families and feature a range of kin relationships, cultural roles and responsibilities, environments and experiences. The animations highlight the importance that these interactions can play in fostering children’s social and emotional wellbeing.

In developing the animations, two core groups of cultural consultants from Central Australia and Victoria were engaged from the start of the project. They worked with KidsMatter to develop the conceptual framework for the videos, including the themes and key messages,

so that they reflect the KidsMatter framework. The cultural consultants drew on their own life and professional experiences to contribute deep understandings of social and emotional wellbeing from an Indigenous worldview and were very generous in sharing their insights and personal stories. Aunty Di Kerr, a Wurundjeri Elder who was engaged as a cultural consultant said, “We don’t often have a voice, and to me this is our voice. We’re sharing our stories and it’s very heartfelt.”

The animations are authentic, relatable and emotionally and spiritually moving. They acknowledge some of the struggles experienced by Aboriginal people while also conveying the strengths within Indigenous culture. They contain messages about hope, being proud, connecting with culture, land and family, staying strong, finding and being role models, and asking for help when you need it.

Carmen Naivalu was one of the Indigenous psychologists engaged by KidsMatter to provide feedback in the context of contemporary research in Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing. She said, “It’s a kind of journey that the viewer is supposed to go on, and find some kind of personal meaning, in themselves, about what this animation is about.”

Because the themes and messages might be relatable to an individual’s own personal experiences, it’s important to be aware that viewing any of the animations may trigger feelings and other reactions in

viewers, and those reactions will vary from person to person, depending on their culture, background and context. KidsMatter has developed a Safety Statement to help professionals to be aware of possible different reactions and how to support people during and after viewing the animations.

The Safety Statement is part of a series of guidance resources, including three videos, that has been developed to help early childhood services to use the animations safely and constructively. Psychologist Dr. Lyn O’Grady, Manager of the KidsMatter team at the Australian Psychological Society said, “We’ve provided a variety of stories and tools for professionals and communities to use to support Aboriginal children’s social and emotional wellbeing. The stories and guidance resources can help professionals to increase their own knowledge and understanding about Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing as well as support the development of stronger relationships with families and communities.”

The animations and guidance resources are designed to be used by any early childhood service, no matter how many Aboriginal families attend their service or are in their broader community, or how strong those relationships are. The intention is to support early childhood services to build connections and develop stronger relationships with local Aboriginal families, in order to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

Rachael McBrien says, “Knowing your community is very important. There might be people within your early childhood community who can assist you, and the animations are a very good starting point. I think it will encourage educators to reflect on what they know and what they don’t know as well”.

The animations and guidance resources are all available online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au/atsi-resources/aboriginal-animations. For further information, please email enquiries@kidsmatter.edu.au.