

A large, light grey stylized tree graphic on the left side of the slide. The tree has two main branches that curve upwards and outwards, ending in a dense canopy of leaves. At the base of the tree, there are two stylized human figures, one on each side, with their arms raised as if holding up the tree. Between the two figures is a red heart. The overall style is clean and modern.

# Evaluation of the Family Group Conferencing Program: Findings & Recommendations

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**SYDNEY**



We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

*Tree of Knowledge* - pokerwork on kangaroo skin, Lynette Riley, 2010

<http://Sydney.edu.au/kinship-module>



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# Evaluation overview

- **Implementation:** assess fidelity of program implementation
- **Outcomes:** examine the extent to which FGC has contributed to *reducing risks and avoiding entry into care* for children and young people
- **Economic analysis:** measure and *compare the cost and benefits* of FGC

# Evaluation governance and ethics

FGC Evaluation Steering Committee, composed of:

- FGC Program Team: knowledge of the program implementation and protocols
- DCJ Districts: to provide insights into the consideration and timing for consultations with caseworkers and casework managers
- FACS Information, Analysis and Research portfolio (FACSIAR): to assist with the evaluation methodology and access to administrative data
- DCJ Aboriginal Outcomes program: to inform the evaluation with local knowledge about the Aboriginal communities in each District and cultural protocols for consultations.

Ethics approval provided by The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and The University of Sydney

An illustration of three stylized human figures standing in a circle, viewed from behind. The figure on the left has short brown hair and wears a light green sweater and dark blue pants. The figure in the center has reddish-brown hair and wears a yellow sweater and light yellow pants. The figure on the right has dark brown hair and wears a blue sweater and dark blue pants. Each figure has their arms around the others, creating a sense of unity and support. The background is a solid red circle. The text "Implementation evaluation" is centered over the figures in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

**Implementation evaluation**

# How did we evaluate the implementation of FGC?

Data collection	Sample
Family interviews	Involving 40 family members (approximately 100 children). 31 Aboriginal participants 9 non-Aboriginal participants.
Workforce surveys	Surveys completed by 85 caseworkers 49 casework managers 35 independent facilitators.
Workforce focus groups	23 facilitators (7 Aboriginal/16 non-Aboriginal) 8 District Coordinators 29 caseworkers/casework managers (15 Aboriginal/14 non-Aboriginal)
Observations of FGCs	9 FGCs observed across 3 sites, with post-FGC facilitator interviews
Referral Information Forms & Family Plans	Sample from 3 sites, with a range of presenting issues and family cultural backgrounds

# Factors associated with a positive FGC experience

## Preparation for the FGC

- Clear communication around issues and expectations
- Early engagement of family, Kin and community
- Having a skilled facilitator who briefs family



## During the FGC

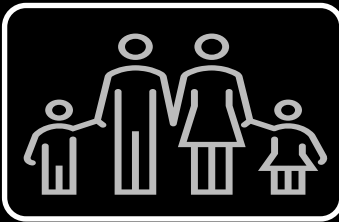
- Facilitator skilled in handling family dynamics and offering cultural support
- Clarity around non-negotiables and support in Private Family Time if needed
- DCJ caseworker or manager in attendance



## Family Plan implementation

- Active caseworker support for implementation
- Accountability for what was agreed
- DCJ conducts the 3-month review

# Messages for practice: Aboriginal communities, children and families



## Engage early with Kinship network and community

- DCJ should value the strength of Aboriginal Kinship networks and community from early engagement to OOHC
- Ensure the right people offer support to the child and are present for the FGC



## Promote cultural safety

- Participants valued Aboriginal facilitators who demonstrated cultural safety and respect
- Genuine and more effective engagement from DCJ with NGOs



## Ensure implementation of the ATSICPP

- Elements of participation, partnership, placement and connection can be implemented through reaching out to the Kinship network and focusing on cultural connection through the preparation, meeting and follow-up phases



# Messages for practice:

## Family decision making and empowerment



### Importance of Family Finding and preparation

- It is critical for caseworkers to identify important people in the child's life
- Families need to be informed about the scope of decision-making



### Skilled facilitators can manage family dynamics

- Skilled facilitators can support the family to keep conflict from escalating
- Conflict management skills and competencies vary between caseworkers and facilitators



### Take care with involving children

- Preparation involves frank assessment of whether children should directly participate
- Alternatives include pre-recorded message and having a photo present

## Messages for practice:

# Relationships & communication between families and DCJ



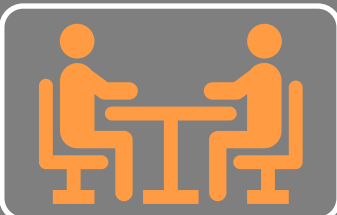
### Importance of honesty & transparency

- Families are expected to be honest about their circumstances and look for the same honesty and transparency from DCJ
- Families expressed concern about the FGC agenda and whether decisions had already been made by DCJ



### Clear communication

- Receiving the right information around expectations helps family members prepare for the FGC
- Changes to the family plan should be communicated to all family members

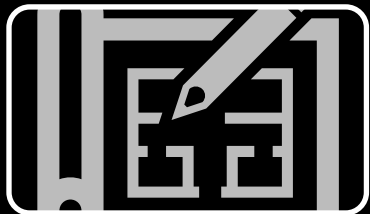


### Caseworker and casework manager attendance

- Families stressed the importance of the caseworker or casework manager attending the FGC so decisions can be made by those who know the case.

# Messages for practice:

## Access to supports and achieving the Family Plan



### Support to implement the Family Plan

- Support for implementation is affected by - high caseloads; staff turnover; waitlists; and inconsistent engagement with NGOs



### Frequent follow-up

- Families stressed the importance of the case worker following up and making referrals to services
- Without follow-up, families may not know about support services available



### Consistent 3-month review

- Confusion was reported about who was responsible for scheduling the review – the caseworker or facilitator
- Reviews don't happen because of competing casework demands, and DCJ deciding that a review is not necessary

An illustration of a woman and a man dancing joyfully. The woman, on the left, has dark hair in a ponytail and is wearing a green sleeveless dress. She has her arms raised and is smiling. The man, on the right, has dark hair and is wearing a blue t-shirt and yellow shorts. He is also smiling and has his arms outstretched. The background is a large, vibrant red shape that resembles a stylized heart or a splash of paint. The overall style is flat and modern.

**Outcomes evaluation**

## How did we evaluate outcomes of FGC?

- Statistical model: We used a **generalized difference-in-difference model** which compares outcomes for children in the FGC program (*treatment group*) before and after the FGC session occurred with outcomes of children at the same time periods (*control group*) for whom no FGC was convened.
- Can control for long-term trends and individual-specific effects
- Main identification assumption for causal effect:
  - ✓ Children in treatment and control groups were on similar trends before FGC treatment occurred
  - ✓ No systematic logic in rollout timing of FGC

# Evaluation framework

#1

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

#2

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

#3

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

#4

2017

2018

2019

2020

2021

#5

2017


2018

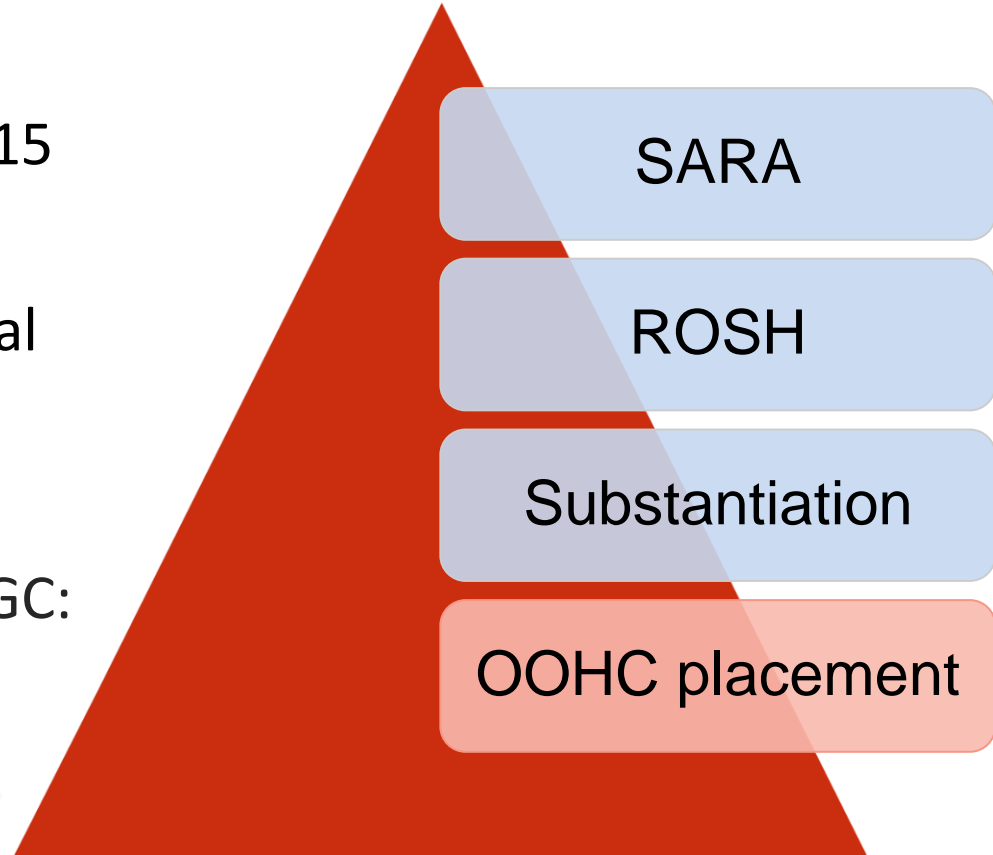
2019

2020

2021


# How did we evaluate outcomes of FGC, continuation?

- Data: De-identified DCJ administrative data from 2015 to June 2021
- Population: 60,487 Aboriginal and 48,387 non-Aboriginal children
- Follow-up period after FGC:  $\geq 6$  months
- Outcomes: 



# Estimation Results

## Statistically significant reductions in:

- 
- Helpline reports: Emotional abuse & Neglect
  - SARA
  - ROSH
  - Harm Substantiations

For ROSH, the effect was only present for Aboriginal children

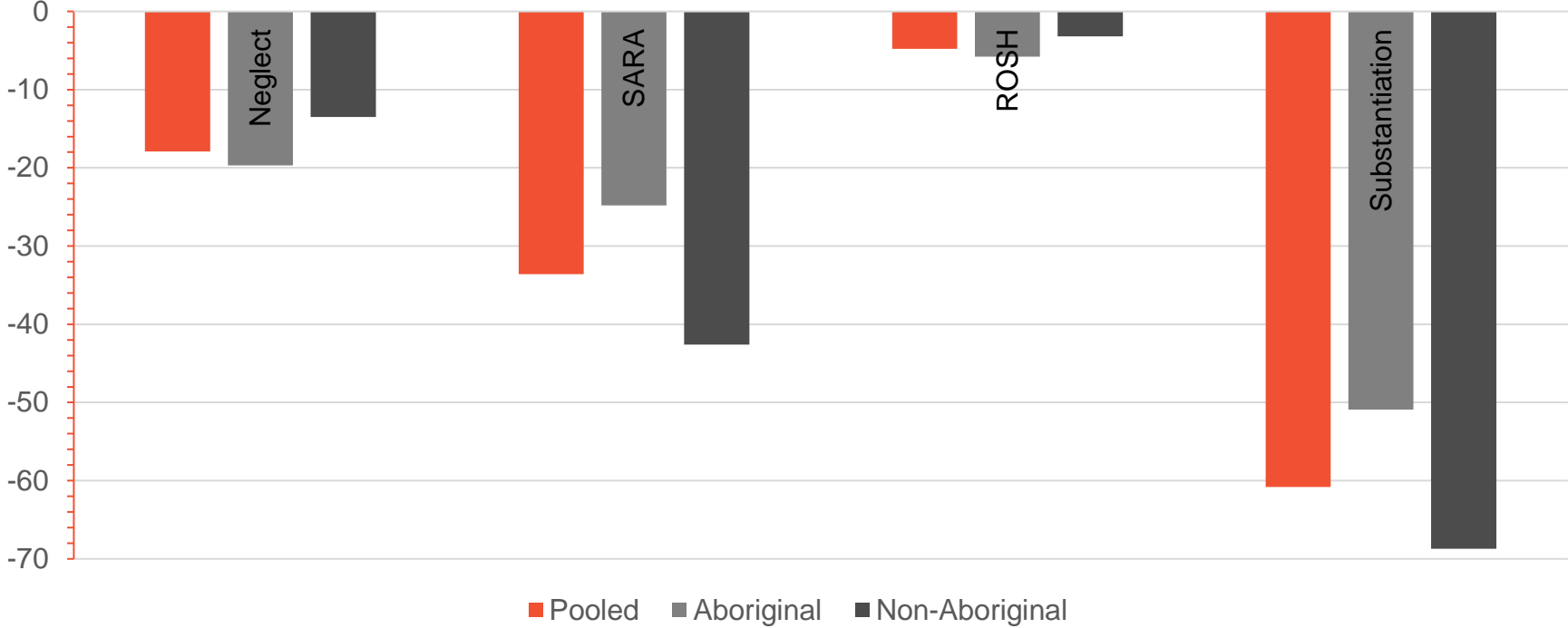
For Helpline Sexual Abuse and SARA effect was only present for non-Aboriginal children

## The strongest effect of FGC was on substantiations:

- **1/2 treated Aboriginal children avoided a subsequent substantiation**
- **2/3 treated non-Aboriginal children avoided a subsequent substantiation**



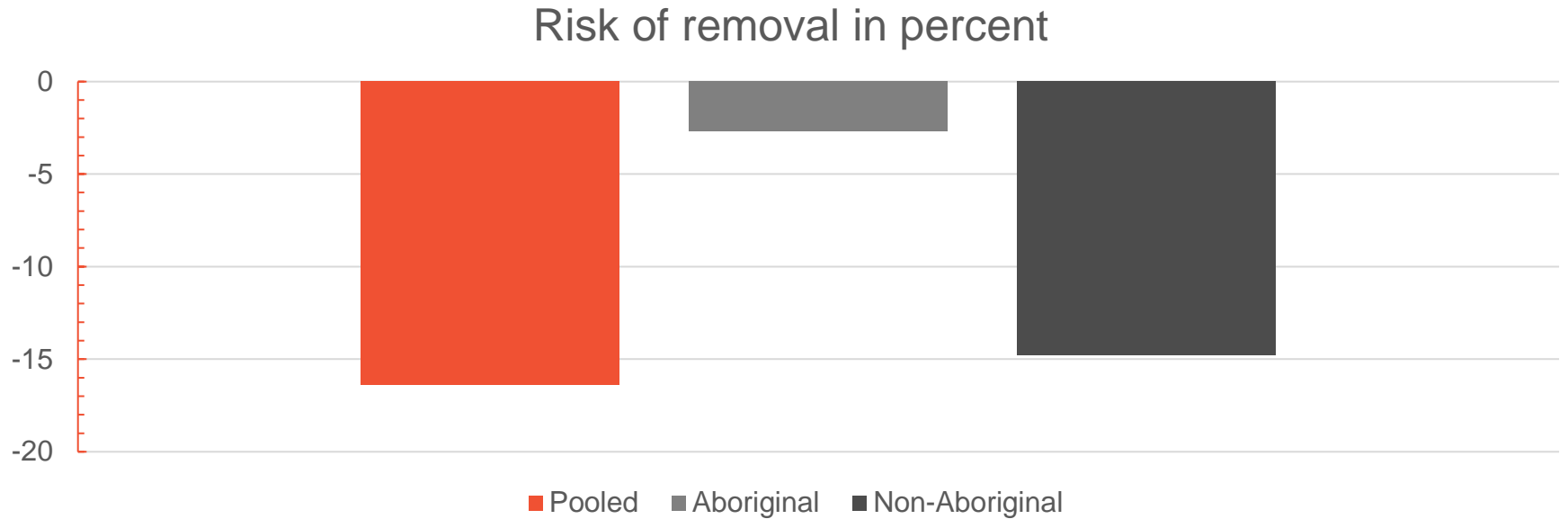
# Estimation Results in Magnitude (Percent relative to sample mean)



# Outcomes evaluation: Removal from home

- Method: Comparison of those referred and who ended up in the FGC program (n=3,728) with children who were also referred but did not receive a FGC (n=1,251).
- The analyses cannot control for longer-term trends and individual fixed effects in this estimation model, given the small number of removals.
- Results are interpreted as statistical associations, not as causal
- **Main result:**
  - ✓ ~ **1/2 children** who received the FGC avoided a removal in the short term
  - ✓ Treatment effect is statistically significant for **non-Aboriginal children**

# Estimation results





**Economic evaluation**

# How did we evaluate the economic cost benefit of FGC?

- We ask: does the FGC increase or decrease social value?
- We calculate the Benefit-Cost-Ratio (BCR):
  - ✓ If  $BCR \geq 1$ : The FGC increases social value
  - ✓ If  $BCR < 1$ : The FGC decreases social value
- Methods:
  - ✓ Costs: Calculate unit costs for operating the FGC program & compare with the cost of providing traditional care.
  - ✓ Social benefits: Derive monetary value from existing economic analyses conducted by DCJ

## FGC cost

- The average cost of a FGC (excluding casework costs) is **\$3,231** ( $SD = \$1,752$ , median = \$2,769), and ranges widely from \$764 to \$14,141.
- Most of the expense for a FGC stems from the cost of the facilitator which averages at **\$2,791** ( $SD = \$1,795$ , median = \$2,272), but there is also a wide range for facilitator fees, from \$273 to \$12,972. This variation can be partially explained by families that have more than one FGC recorded.
- Other costs for the FGC relate to venue, catering, childcare, interpreters, and office supplies, which range on average from \$7 to \$1,682.

## Economic analysis key findings

The costs of a FGC are estimated to be **\$7,914**. This includes FGC costs of \$3,231 per family, with the majority of those costs being the facilitator fees (around \$2,700), and the cost of DCJ staff time of \$4,683.

Social benefits for avoided ROSH substantiation was estimated to be **\$91,032**. Sum of avoided costs to the Government (\$33,726) and the broader economic benefits to the client (\$57,306).

**For every dollar spent on the FGC program, society will recoup \$7.2 on average, \$5.5 for families with Aboriginal children and \$8.0 for families with non-Aboriginal children**

# Recommendations





# Aboriginal communities, children and families



**Engage early with Aboriginal Kinship networks and communities to draw out their strengths and contributions**



**Promote cultural safety through support from Aboriginal facilitators and cultural support people**



**Enhance integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in FGC implementation**



# FGC preparation and engagement



**Encourage caseworkers to invest time in Family Finding to have the right people present**



**Include adequate information in referrals so that facilitators and families understand parameters of decision making**



**Take care with inclusion of children in meetings, with consideration of alternatives like pre-recorded message**



# Communications between DCJ and families



**Ensure families and their networks have comprehensive information about the FGC and the non-negotiables**



**Ask caseworkers and managers to commit to attendance and follow-up on the Family Plan**



**Follow-up by caseworker with family to offer support as they implement the Family Plan is critical**



# FGC processes and procedures



**Extend the 4-week period for FGC if needed for cultural and other considerations to engage family members**



**Monitor facilitator performance using the evaluation forms completed by FGC participants, and offer ongoing professional development to facilitators**



**Consistently conduct and review the family plans, to ensure assistance with connecting the family to services and resources**



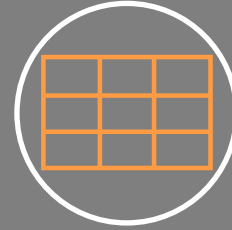
# FGC processes and procedures



**Clarify that the facilitator can assist during private family time “when and as requested”**



**Record in FGC data collection the reasons for refusal or cancellation of FGC, and also record context for the FGC**



**Link families to expenditure in expense recordings, to improve estimates on the costs of FGC per family**



Thank You



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Website:

<https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups/research-centre-for-children-and-families.html>

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Email to register for our mailing list.

