

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission

From: Anonymous

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Submission:

YOOROOK

Three years ago, our lives changed forever, when we agreed to become Kinship carers to a bright and bubbly one year old girl. There are three children, with the one-year-old being the youngest.

She had already been in 2 placements before she came to us. Sadly, her two older siblings were placed into foster care, under the condition that the foster carer would keep them connected to culture.... they did not.

My husband is related to her on her maternal side, she is his niece. We are both proud Aboriginal people with strong ties to our community. We did not have any children, so we were unsure what we were getting ourselves into.

We met with a social worker from child protection, or what is now known as Dept. of families, fairness and housing. We were assessed, we gave our details, and our working with children checks and they arranged a visit to our home. I recall my husband feeling uncomfortable with them being in our house, but it was something we were required to do.

We were with DFFH for a period of twelve months before we were transferred to the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency under section 18.

In that time, we were offered no supports, no respite options, no counselling or support service. We were a young couple, with no children and we had to learn very quickly how to care for a traumatised child.

When we would bring things up, or ask for help, we felt as though we were inconveniencing the workers. We encountered multiple issues with child protection as an agency and went as far to make a complaint.

The main issues that we encountered with DFFH Child Protection were as follows:

- We told workers that this one-year-old was struggling, and exhibiting trauma-based behaviours such as pulling out her hair, gouging at her eyes and scratching her skin until it would bleed, we were told that 'she is too young and can't vocalise it, we will deal with it when she is older'
- Transport workers would take her from child-care to have contact visits without her mum without notifying us, this occurred multiple times, we would show up to her child-care centre to find that she was not there
- A transport worker once brought her home with NO NAPPY on and she had soiled herself, we put in multiple complaints, met with management and was told it was a system issue
- We were never told anything about how contact went, or if our niece was fed

- VACCA was not involved for at least that first year. We asked a few times about where our supports were, culturally safe support and we were never offered any
- We had to find our own respite, our own resources and navigate this system by ourselves with no help. Whilst the foster carer who had the other two siblings was offered multiple supports, NDIS funding and even a worker who would visit the home on Saturdays to help with the children
- When we were burnt out and asked for help because we were struggling to cope, we told they could end the placement, this was always a threat that would hang over our heads, so we always felt very alone

It got to the point where we became fearful that they would judge our parenting ability and if we were to have children of our own, they might watch us.

We were blindsided and promised so many supports, but when they dropped her off at our house three years ago, they left us alone and never supported us at all. It was like they did not care about her; they just wanted the bare minimum for her, just a house and food and did not care about her wellbeing.

Her siblings struggled a lot more than she did, their behaviours were so out of control that their foster carer stated that they were 'brain damaged'. Their foster carer was racist, and judgemental and did not want them near family. Multiple times during family contact visits, her siblings would announce that they were not Aboriginal and that she was not either. She would come home and tell us that she was not Aboriginal and that we were not her family. We complained about the foster carer many times, until they eventually removed the children from her and returned them to family. She also lived an hour away from family/community and this made things very hard for us to maintain a secure relationship with the kids.

We were transferred to VACCA, and since then the children have begun to heal and thrive. Our little one is doing very well, and is almost ready for Prep, she is reading and writing and is emotionally secure. Her siblings have returned to family and begun their healing journey and their behaviours are no longer as severe as they were when they were with the foster carer. They are now proud to say they are Aboriginal and attend community events.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done, but to be completely truthful, DFFH are ill equipped to deal with Indigenous families, and they should not be in any capacity.