

Aboriginal mothers fear there will be a new generation of stolen children

ABC Gippsland / By Mim Cook

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Carla (not her real name) says she didn't get to say goodbye or explain the situation to her children before they were taken. (ABC Gippsland: Mim Cook)

Aboriginal mothers are living with the fear their children could be taken.

The Victorian Government announced a \$10 million [redress scheme](#) for Stolen Generations survivors last month.

But many in the Australian Indigenous community say children are still being taken.

"I'd just given birth, my daughter was two hours old and we were in hospital when I received a call," Gunditjmara and Yuin Nation mother Yaraan Bundle said.

"It's extremely traumatic, at such a sacred time where you should be protected and nurtured, to experience the department coming and trying to remove your family."

The department referred to is the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). It acknowledges that Aboriginal children are over-represented in out-of-home care.

Key points:

- Indigenous children are 10 times more likely to be removed from their families than other children
- Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People says institutional racism is part of the problem
- A support service for Aboriginal families says women have a justified fear of the system

National [research](#) shows Indigenous children are 10 times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children, and they make up 36 per cent of children living away from their parents in Australia.

Ms Bundle's daughter remains with her, but so does the fear, anger, and frustration.

"I feel an intense fire deep within me, like a lioness protecting her babies. I always thought hospitals were the safest place for us to give birth, but now I understand they are not."



Naomi Murphy, her children and her mum, on a return to country trip. (Supplied: Naomi Murphy)

Many women, same concerns

Indigenous mother Carla (not her real name) is eight months pregnant.

"Absolutely they'll try and take my baby from me," she said.

Carla has had children removed from her care with her children separated in different out-of-home care situations.

"I've got my own housing, I've done parenting courses, I've done everything they've said, as well as try and cope without my children, which is a struggle every day," she said.

"This has put a big hole in my life. You can never heal that pain, and this has been happening to our people for generations."

Aunty Hazel volunteers her time supporting mothers as part of the organisation she began in 2014, called Grandmothers Against Removal.

Aunty Hazel said she remembered hiding as a child when the department came to take children from the mission she lived on.

Fighting for her family's reunification is what inspired her to help other mothers.

"When you reflect back on these conversations you're having with women, you'll realise the essence of what they're saying is like you're talking to one person, not many," Aunty Hazel said.

"By the time the children can get back they don't know where they came from. It can be an 18-year sentence."

'Institutional racism' part of the problem: commissioner

The Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Justin Mohamed, said the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care was an Australia-wide situation.

"The fear these mothers, sisters, grandmothers and aunties have is justified and stems from lived experience and real situations," he said.

"There are real accounts of children being removed and often never being able to reconnect again. There is an acceptance this is not right. We need to see Aboriginal children reunified with their families.

"As a white family you won't have this feeling, as you parent, that a department could come and be involved in raising or even removing your children."



A Facebook post by an anonymous source complaining about a baby being taken from hospital. (Facebook)

Mr Mohamed said institutional racism was part of the reason why so many Aboriginal children were still removed from their parents in Australia.

"The view and past policies of Aboriginal people in Australia has been through the lens of white Australia, who see Aboriginal people as dysfunctional," he said.

"So the policies developed are saying we need to protect Aboriginal people from themselves.

"Institutional racism has to be addressed to change a racist process of class and value ... or lack of value."

DHHS said, in a statement, self-determination for Aboriginal families was part of the solution.

"We're working hard to address the unacceptable over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and improving outcomes for Aboriginal children involved with child protection," the statement said.



Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People Justin Mohamed says institutional racism needs to be addressed. (Supplied: Victorian Commissioner For Aboriginal Children And Young People)



Antoinette Braybrook (far right) as a child with her brothers Shaun and Ryan in 1974. (Supplied: Antoinette Braybrook)

Connection to culture key to strengthening families

Antoinette Braybrook is the CEO of Djirra, a legal, cultural and support service for Aboriginal families.

She said she remembered DHHS coming to her door if she and her siblings missed any school, even though she had a happy and safe childhood.

"With my work with Djirra we see this happening all of the time with Aboriginal women, a justified fear of the system," she said.

"It's an approach that's not about supporting. It's about punishing."

Waka Waka woman Naomi Murphy was taken from her parents when she was a child.

Ms Murphy's mother is part of Australia's Stolen Generations.

"My sister and I were taken two states away. My first suicide attempt was when I was 11 because I missed my parents like crazy," she said.

"DHHS never stepped in because we were with white men. When I finally got home to my parents I was broken."

Ms Murphy is now a mother herself, and said she has lived with threats her children could be taken.

"Healing started when I connected to my culture. It gives you purpose and identity," she said.

"I had to learn how to be a mum because my mum was Stolen Generations and she didn't know how to be a mum."