



WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICES NSW

**Best Practice Case Study
Early Intervention Family Law project for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Marrin Weejali)**

Women's Legal Services NSW (WLS NSW) is greatly concerned by the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia.

An Aboriginal Women's Consultation Network guides the Women's Legal Services NSW Indigenous Women's Legal Program. It meets quarterly to ensure we deliver a culturally responsive service. The members include regional community representatives and the Indigenous Women's Legal Program staff. There is a representative from the Aboriginal Women's Consultation Network on the WLS NSW Board.

The Aboriginal Women's Consultation Network has identified the area of care and protection as a priority area.

We believe an important part of the solution to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care is adequate, timely, culturally responsive early intervention and support.

A practical way of doing this is to encourage women to get free legal advice at an early stage before a crisis happens and the Department of Family and Community Services removes the children from the care of their parents due to safety or other concerns.

Rather than going through the Children's Courts it can be better for family members to seek orders in the family law system to care for the children. In this way the safety of the child is prioritised at the same time as ensuring the children are with people they know and who can continue to foster their connection to country, culture and kinship structure.

Through our Indigenous Women's Legal Program, Women's Legal Services NSW offers such an early intervention approach.

It's also important to advocate for available, accessible, culturally responsive early intervention support services which are free or low cost. We do this through our community engagement and law reform work.