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Aboriginal children's watchdog April Lawrie calls for review, more carers

Too many Aboriginal children who are removed from their parents are ending up with non-Aboriginal carers and a review is urgently needed, a watchdog says.

Lauren Novak, Social Policy Editor, The Advertiser

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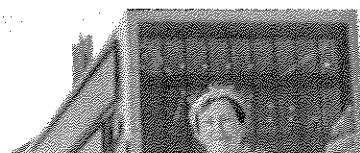
Aboriginal Children's Commissioner April Lawrie said it was a "myth" that there were not enough indigenous families to take children in state care and has called on the Child Protection Department to do more to identify willing carers. She also said Aboriginal families needed more tailored support to address issues before they reached the point where a child must be removed.

Aboriginal children account for a third of all those in state care (or about 1320 of 4000), despite making up just four per cent of the population.

Figures released following requests from *The Advertiser* show that, as of June 30, 850 had been put with carers in line with what is known as the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. That proportion (about 64 per cent of all indigenous kids in care) has remained stable over the past three years.

Ms Lawrie wants a review of how the department is adhering to the principle to lift the rate. "We need more Aboriginal workers with connection to community to use those connections to identify Aboriginal carers," she said.

"Having a strong sense of identity and belonging to family and cultural heritage — our Aboriginal families can give that to these kids."





Aboriginal carer Rose Ward standing in her Morphett Vale home in South Australia with an artwork she painted inspired by her experience as a carer. Picture: AAP/Emma Brasier

Departmental data shows there were 239 active Aboriginal kinship carers at June 30, up from 186 three years ago.

The number of Aboriginal, but unrelated, foster carers fluctuated between 27 and 37 over the same period.

Department deputy chief executive Fiona Ward said sometimes it was “unable to locate kin who are willing and able, and can provide a safe environment” for an Aboriginal child.

Ms Lawrie said it was “a myth” that there were not enough suitable carers and urged the department to consider extended family such as aunts, uncles or cousins.

Ms Ward said an Aboriginal Family Scoping team had, since January, found carers for 82 children and worked on “reconnecting them with their culture”.

There is a target to increase the proportion of staff who are Aboriginal from 5 to 10 per cent by 2024. The department is designing a \$2.2 million program to support Aboriginal families in Adelaide’s western suburbs, before children are removed.

Rose Ward and her husband Steve care for two young granddaughters removed from their parents about five years ago.

The 50-year-old former emergency nurse said she did “a lot of painting and storytelling with the girls to

