How can the Department for Child Protection and Family Support develop a South Sudanese Community Carers’ model?

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Abstract

This action research is a reflective account of how I tried to understand the concerns the South Sudanese community have with the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support (the Department). My initial intention was to set a question which would explore practical solutions on how the Department might develop a model of community care should a child enter the out of home care system, to create culturally connected placements. As well as exploring the tensions and implications of being both a researcher and a Departmental practitioner, I reflect on how I found that this question, as my starting point as a researcher, was at odds with the participants’ agendas, as they struggled to cope with the systemic fragmentation of their culture.

I explain why I chose a transformative paradigm to engage in authentic participation, to hear the voices of the participants and attempt to create an action agenda to address inequalities. Throughout this thesis, I use the voices of South Sudanese participants alongside my own White voice, woven together to critically analyse and reflect on key moments of self-realisation. I also highlight how a decolonial lens has helped me better understand the legacies colonisation left by silencing non-Western populations, and the effects this has left on South Sudanese families, as they try to navigate a new country and understand the role of a statutory child protection system.

I argue how I believe that action research, as a methodology, has the power to break down barriers, and show how this has resulted in a new and meaningful level of dialogue with South Sudanese leaders and families that I had never reached previously. I illustrate how this established new innovative partnerships and relationships, which include co-presenting the research itself, alongside leaders and community members. This story is not presented as neat, linear cycles, but instead, it tries to capture the messiness involved in the process of action research and illustrates the desire that I had to achieve meaningful change.

I also consider the implications for future practice, as I tell the research story, and conclude arguing how this transformative process has directly affected, not only how we consider new ways of practising, but also the importance that should be placed on attempting to dismantle Eurocentric starting points used by researchers and practitioners.
DECLARATION

Having completed my research towards the degree of Masters of Advanced Social Work, I hereby submit my thesis for examination in accordance with the regulations and declare that this thesis is my own work. This thesis has been completed during the course of my enrolment in this degree at the University of Western Australia and has not been submitted previously to this or any other institution.

Caroline Speirs 12/11/2018
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INTRODUCTION

During my career in the Department of Communities (the Department), previously Department for Child Protection and Family Support, I have seen the frustrations of many South Sudanese families during interactions with members of my Department.

This research’s procedure does not follow a conventional thesis format because I have tried to take the reader on a journey and capture the messiness of the process. I hope the chapters represent the cyclic flow of action research and tell the story of this ever-changing environment.

Since I started my professional work with the Departmental office in the Mirrabooka area of Western Australia in 2005, I have seen consistent dissatisfaction with the Department from community members. On the one hand I have witnessed some of the challenging situations that statutory child protection workers have faced engaging South Sudanese parents; but on the other hand I find that I have my own personal, deep concerns, about the marginalisation and disempowerment of the South Sudanese families themselves. This starting point of my research focus is summarised by Whitehead (2006) when he describes how we can experience ourselves as a living contradiction when our values are denied in our practice.

Throughout my professional career I have always worked with people in marginalised communities in both Scotland and Australia, and believe strongly in values of social justice and equality. My background has inspired me to look at creative ways of developing authentic participation for people who are traditionally silenced or oppressed in the community. This belief was further endorsed after a cultural exchange to Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 2003, where I met with professional artists who had previously been referred to only as ‘refuse collectors living in the favelas’. The profound impact Paulo Freire had on this group led them to work together and take collective action using the arts as a medium to challenge their social and political situations. Freire argues that it is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must act together upon their environment in order to critically reflect upon their reality, and so transform it through further action and critical reflection (Freire, 1972).
This thinking has inspired me towards developing a transformative epistemology as the basis for my research, so that social justice is set as the core principle. The transformative worldview holds that the research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression. Transformative research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institution and the researcher’s life (Mertens, Holmes & Harris 2009). Mertens asks: “What is the researcher’s role with regard to the promotion of social justice? How can researchers address issues of power and inequities as a means to furthering human rights?” (Johnson & Mertens, 2012, p. 803).

A body of research has been conducted on how Sudanese families are adapting to Australian life and report on the struggles they face (Milner et al., 2010; Qin et al., 2015; Khawaja et al., 2018; Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009; Savic, Chur-Hansen, Mahmood & Moore, 2016; Tempany, 2009; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006. There is also an awareness of the tensions these families face, with researchers such as Deng and Marlow (2013), Deng (2016), Gustafson and Iluebbey (2013), Kaur (2012), Losoncz (2013, 2016), Abuyi (2013), Hashimoto-Govindasamy and Rose (2011), Lewis et al., (2010) stressing the tensions South Sudanese have when they are confronted by Western child protection systems.

Having witnessed the frustrations, dissatisfaction and even fear expressed by the South Sudanese community toward the Department, I became more concerned about the origin of those fears, whether personal or cultural, and how we, as a Department, could modify our approaches to working with this community to achieve a more harmonious relationship.

Consequently, this study is concerned with identifying the beliefs, feelings and attitudes of the South Sudanese community toward the Department and understanding the traditional cultural practices within the community which may have led to cultural dissonance, misunderstandings and even fear. It also attempts to explore new ways or models of practice to develop more meaningful relationships between the Department and the community. I hope the chapters ahead represent cyclic flow of action research, and tell the story of this ever-changing environment we find ourselves in.
Chapter one sets the context of my research, as I give more background on the focus of South Sudanese families interacting with the Department and the challenges they face.

Chapter two covers the Sudanese context and the refugee story, followed by my own personal context with the reasons I was inspired to carry out this research.

Chapter three provides the theoretical contexts, and the story of why I thought action research was the best methodology to use.

Chapter four covers the engagement process, including the interview details, focus groups and ethics.

Chapter five is the story of the cycles, where I will show how the three cycles were developed which eventually led to a number of actions.

Chapter six covers sections on the cycles outlining emerging themes as key moments of reflection and learning.

In Chapter seven I revisit the original question and find out if it has been answered and achieved what I set out to do. I also explore the significance of my research and outline how it helped change my practice.

In Chapter eight I present a proposed model of practice based on an engagement matrix that I have developed as a result of my research findings.

I finish my research journey in Chapter nine, with my conclusion and discussion of the findings of my research, as I draw together the outcomes and insights that emerged during the research process.
CHAPTER 1 Background

The Department of Communities is the Western Australian statutory government organisation responsible for the delivery of services and providing protection to children and young people from abuse and neglect. The main legislation underpinning the work of the Department is the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (CCA Act).

In 2005, it appeared that families from a refugee background were increasingly coming to the attention of the Department when they reached crisis point. In the Mirrabooka area of Perth, a northern suburb with a high number of refugee settlement, little was known by staff about settlement issues newly-arrived families faced. In response to this gap in knowledge, a number of initiatives were established, one being the creation of my position of Specialist Community Child Protection Worker with a focus on relationship building and preventative work with the newly arrived communities.

An example of this work might be of neighbours reporting that young children were being left home alone. On further investigation it was discovered that parents had not considered the impacts these decisions might have on their families living in their new environment. Parents described how their children, while living in their country of origin, always had family members close at hand either in the village or in the refugee camp, so leaving them unattended hadn’t been an issue for them to consider. Situations like this allowed case workers to think differently and place more importance on relationship building and education rather than implementing more punitive measures. This supports with Sawriker’s thoughts (2017), who stresses the importance that culturally normal behaviours should not be mislabeled as neglect in a Western country, but instead suggests that workers should re-examine their assessment criteria.

Around the same time, the focus moved to develop new Departmental training for case workers, which moved beyond the assumption that merely treating people equally or using interpreters was sufficient to become culturally competent practitioners, and instead looked at broader areas of oppression and systemic racism. The Department has also established a number of initiatives aimed at being more effective when working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) families. An internal CaLD Working Group in 2010 focused on the recruitment of foster carers from CaLD backgrounds in an attempt to encourage
new families to consider becoming carers. This was in line with the Principle for the Placement of CaLD Children and Young People (the CaLD Placement Principle).

Through their practice wisdom, Working Group members were instinctively aware of Triandis’ argument, who states Western child protection systems are predominantly described as individualistic, with a tendency to view the self as independent (Triandis, 2001). Collectivism is explained by Hebbani, Obijiofor and Bristol (2012) as emphasising loyalty to the group, unlike individualistic cultures (such as Australia) ranking concern for themselves over concern for others and placing a high value on independence and privacy. Group members noted that the existing foster care recruitment resources were very Western in their approach, and that the culture of CaLD families were not reflected in any of the recruitment material. They then invited a number of CaLD community leaders to meet Department staff who suggested that the term ‘fostering’ was an alien concept, and spoke about how in their countries of origin, communities informally cared for children if the need arose. The Working Group created posters (See Appendix 1.1) which they felt reflected these conversations.

If we consider these policies alongside the importance placed on the collective within South Sudanese families, then I think it makes sense to consider of caring for children in a similar collective way. Research carried out by Brown, George, Sintzel and St Arnault (2009) indicates that there is less conflict between birth families and foster carers when they share their own cultural background. In addition, those who participated in his study benefited from being able to practise their own culture and to teach it to the foster children without concern about being inconsistent with the child's birth family and community values.

There are references in the Department’s Casework Practice Manual (CPM) to the aspiration for the placement of children within their communities. Specifically, the principles for the placement of children from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds are enshrined in the CCA Act1, and operationalised in the Department’s Child Placement Principle, which states:

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1 2 s.8 (1) In determining what is in a child’s best interests the following matters must be taken into account – (i) The child’s age, maturity, sex, sexuality, background and language
(j) The child’s cultural, ethnic or religious identity
(k) The child’s physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, developmental and educational needs.
Aboriginal/Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) children have a right to maintain this connection which enables Aboriginal/CaLD children to maintain or develop a strong sense of identity, which includes their culture and belonging to their country. The Department is guided by the Aboriginal/CaLD child placement principle which states the preference for placement with family, kin, or community members for Aboriginal or CaLD children who are in the CEO’s care. (Department Casework Practice Manual)

This principle has been significantly researched from an Aboriginal perspective by McDowall (2016), Atkinson (2005), Valentine and Gray (2006), and the impacts are well documented for Aboriginal children in care, but little is said about CaLD children and the issues their families face.

In developing this research, I wanted to find ways of creating opportunities to hear directly from South Sudanese families on what they thought a community-based model of care might look like. I was keen to hear more about a collectivist or community led approach allowing children to maintain connections with their communities. I hoped the research process might lead to the development of a community care model, but regardless of the end result, I knew there would be rich dialogue about how the Department might be more responsive to the needs of the community.

This section has looked at the current legislation and policies in Western Australia, outlining some of the importance that is placed on maintaining cultural connections for children. The next stage is to outline why I was drawn to an action research methodology.

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s.10 (1) If a decision under this Act is likely to have a significant impact on a child’s life then, the child should be given – (a) adequate information, in a manner and language that the child can understand ...  
(c) any assistance that is necessary for the child to express those wishes and views  
3 s80. Guidelines for placement of certain children  
(1) the CEO must establish written guidelines to be observed when making placement arrangements for children from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.  
(2) Without limiting the scope of the guidelines, they are to address the need to preserve and enhance a child’s cultural, ethnic and religious identity.
CHAPTER 2 The research in context

This chapter seeks to understand the political and social turmoil South Sudanese refugees have experienced in their own country, and how these may influence their emotions, attitudes, feelings and cultural identities in Australia. It concludes with a discussion on my own experience when visiting a Sudanese refugee camp in Kenya, and how it influenced my determination to proceed with this research project.

2.1 The South Sudanese context

Zambakari (2015, p. 69) states that the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan is one of the longest, deadliest, and most intractable conflicts over the last five decades. During these years it is estimated that 2.5 million people have died, and more than 5 million have been uprooted due to that war.

Multiple internal conflicts have resulted in Sudan being intermittently involved in civil war with itself since political independence in June 1956; drought and famine compounded the great human suffering. According to Akodjenou, United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Refugee Coordinator for the South Sudan Situation (UNHCR, 2018), there is a continued increase in South Sudanese refugees who move into the six neighbouring countries: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. He suggests that, as the crisis enters 2018, the magnitude of the influx remains alarming, with the refugee population projected to reach 3.1 million by December 2018.

Over the years there were a number of failures to reaching peace. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 and the Vote of Independence in 2011 created South Sudan as a country in its own right. Johnson (2016) quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu who, when talking about the high expectations everyone had when the South Sudanese thought they would enjoy the fruits of freedom in 2011, instead watched in horror as the political crisis escalated. He reports that the atrocious senseless civil war that followed took an ethnic turn, this time not by oppressors, but committed by South Sudanese against their own people.

I was always led to believe the unrest between North and South Sudan was based on the tensions between the Muslim north and the Christian south; but Idris (2012) argues this is
a European account of history, with northern Sudan seen as oriental, while people of southern Sudan presented as people without history, a very simplistic and naive account of history. Northern Sudanese were deemed Arab, Muslim, and civilized, whereas southern Sudanese were considered black, heathen, and primitive.

Idris further argues that these geographical, racial, and cultural identities were, however, products of historical processes, namely slavery and colonialism, which can explain the long-term unrest. Deng (2006, p. 157) also states that African-Arab dualism is an oversimplification, stressing that differences themselves do not cause conflicts. He states that it is in fact the implications of issues of power sharing, wealth, access to services, development opportunities and rights of citizenship that lead to conflict. He stresses how complex these issues are if we also consider the country’s racial, ethnic, cultural and religious configuration.

The Turkish-Egyptian expansion in the mid-19th century involved the use of slaves to expand the Egyptian armies. Consequently, the southern area of Sudan saw large-scale slavery, while the northern Sudanese economy became dependent on the slave trade to establish networks for Egypt.

In 1924, the British divided Sudan into two territories between north and south, and it seems the divide became more pronounced. In north Sudan, the British established a mainly Arabic-speaking government, and Arabic eventually became the official language of the country. The southern area, on the other hand, was left to Christian missionaries with no voice in government, and remained isolated and cut-off from the world.

In the North, the British helped create an educated Arab and Muslim Sudanese elite, and invested heavily in economic and social development. D’Agoût (2013) argues that the British never planned to forge a single nation state while helping the educated Arab and Muslim Sudanese elite and investing heavily in their economic and social development. Thus, it comes as no surprise that in 1956, when Sudan became independent, civil war broke out due to these inequities between north and south, when British colonial rule was replaced by the “northern domination”, in which the Arabs replaced the British in a system of internal colonialism.
After the second civil war 1983-2005, international pressure pushed for the signing of the CPA to establish a power sharing arrangement between north and south, with the formation of the Autonomous Government of South Sudan. Peace was short-lived when John Garang, First Vice President of Sudan, and someone the people expected to take the country to peace, died in a helicopter crash.

In July 2011 a referendum took place, with voters included from those displaced all over the world, and South Sudan became a new country. Consequently, as Idris (2012) suggests, we do need to understand the impact of these legacies of slavery and colonisation, and their impact on South Sudan as a fractured country today, in spite of its independence.

2.2 The Australian context
Large numbers of Sudan-born and South Sudan-born refugees fled to neighbouring countries and lived in refugee camps such as Kakuma and Dadaab in Kenya. Under Australia’s Humanitarian programme many of the victims of the second civil war were granted refugee status in Australia, with their numbers peaking between 2002 and 2007.

Not surprisingly, South Sudanese people arriving in Australia are profoundly affected by their experiences of war and dislocation from their homeland. Schweitzer et al., (2006, p. 184) report that South Sudanese refugees have been exposed to traumatic events including torture, threats to themselves and their families’ lives, rape or sexual abuse, food shortages and destruction of homes and villages. If we keep this in mind, then add how dislocation significantly impacts family systems leading to child welfare concerns once they settle, we start building up a picture of how traumatic the refugee experience is for new arrivals in Australia. We also begin to understand the great emotional distress Sudanese refugees face as they arrive.

2.3 Personal context
The inspiration to start this research originated in October 2015 when I was a member of an informal group of seven who informally gathered with the idea to travel to the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, a camp situated 100 kms from the South Sudanese border. The group included representatives from the local authority, WA Police, education, disability and legal services. We were all working with refugee families in the Mirrabooka area, and
all had a desire to find out more about how we might become more responsive practitioners in our areas of work, and in our respective workplaces.

On one occasion during the stay, our UNHCR coordinator convened a group of elders from the various zones of the camp to meet us and discuss life in Kakuma. The allocation of visas was the first topic they raised; they were worried that the current political climate had moved to supporting Syrian refugees, and concerned that they might be overlooked for resettlement overseas.

As I was trying to reflect on the gravity of their situation, realising that some people had been living in Kakuma for 20 years, I was taken aback that the second topic was directed firmly at me as ‘the woman from child protection’. A South Sudanese elder said that he heard that people were settling well in countries like Australia, England and Canada; but the one issue they wrote back to the camp complaining about was there was a government department he had heard who were ‘child stealers’. He went on to elaborate that he had heard that parents could not touch their children, and the police took them away if they even shouted at their children. He aggressively stated to me that I should know all Africans love their children.

I had heard that argument many times in Mirrabooka but was astonished to hear this in the midst of such distant and adverse surroundings. There I was in the middle of a hot, humid, oppressive refugee camp, meeting with elders who had been there for many years; yet, one of their major concerns was focused on the fear and anger at the Department I was employed by. I had also heard from community members that the rumours about the Department being known as child stealers originated in the refugee camps.

I was intrigued to find out more, and asked the UNCHR coordinator if she could link me with the elder to find out if I could talk with him individually, since I was curious to find out more about his perceptions of child protection systems. As we spoke together I explained how I heard the rumours about child stealing in the community where I worked in Australia, but that families said those rumours started in the refugee camps.

He explained that it was extended family members leaving Kakuma settling overseas then writing back to the camp who were reporting this. We had an in-depth conversation during which he explained why he thought South Sudanese families were struggling, and I spoke
about my own frustrations, feeling I wasn’t able to respond effectively to their situations. I finished by asking him if he had one piece of advice that I might take home to Australia, which could make a difference for the families living there, and this was his response:

If a bird is looking after her eggs in a nest then all is well. If a man puts his hand into her nest and touches the eggs, the mother bird flies away never to return. And so you should think what you are doing when you meddle in an African family. (Sudanese refugee, Kakuma Refugee Camp, October 15, 2015)

This statement had a profound effect on me, as I realised the depth of sentiment behind the words. It summed up the whole concept of how foreign it is to African communities to have someone from government involved in a family. He, like many other families, have told me over the years that South Sudanese children belong in South Sudanese families, and this story to me has acted as my catalyst to develop my research proposal: how can we build that nest?

Sawrikar (2017) emphasises that strong family and community cohesion is important in the family unit, and Deng (2016, p. 99), advises that parents tend to promote values such as helpfulness and interdependence within the family, which differs from societies where some parents put a more emphasis on individual independence and the pursuit of individual achievements. So I would argue that if, as the literature suggests, there are positive outcomes if children are matched in culturally appropriate placements, then it makes sense to consider placing children within community should the need arise. Having identified salient background experiences of South Sudanese refugees, the next chapter focuses on particular research contexts for this study.
Chapter 3 Research contexts

Chapter 2 identified the cultural, social and political upheavals in the country of origin of the South Sudanese refugees. It further traced the implications of the personal, traumatic experiences on their individual and family lives in Australia, and how these experiences and their cultural backgrounds seem to influence their beliefs and perceptions of the Department. Their belief that the Department were "Child Stealers" made a great impact on my own perceptions of my role, and that we need to find a way of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the South Sudanese refugee community in order to minimise the negative feelings toward the Department and attempt to change the refugees’ beliefs and attitudes. To do this it became very clear that elders, community leaders, families and individuals from the South Sudanese community had to be involved in any decisions affecting them.

3.1 Participatory research

From reviewing the literature, it seems that the most appropriate methodology for research in which community participation and initiatives are part of the process is the Action Research model. Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerrit (2002) describe “action research is with people, and not on people”. Stringer (2014) also places importance on developing participatory research:

Action research is a collaborative approach to inquiry or investigation that provides people to take systemic action to resolve specific problems. (Stringer, 2014, p. 8)

As well as getting community involvement in identifying their fears and beliefs, there was an emerging need to explore new meaningful ways to build relationships between the community and the Department. With the principles of equality and social justice firmly embedded at the heart of my research, I was inspired by the work of Mertens et al. (2009), who uses transformative paradigms in her work, and which allowed me to develop a methodology that reflected South Sudanese ways of being and knowing.

Having decided on the desire to develop participatory research, the next chapter provides an outline of the Action Research Model and Transformative Learning Theory.
3.2 Transformative learning theory

I wanted to choose a methodology which was going to ensure that the voices of the participants were heard, and that they were key in driving the direction of the work. I found the article by Pittaway, Bartolomei and Huigman (2010) “Stop Stealing Our Stories”, particularly helpful in highlighting some key concerns regarding the ethics of research. They highlight the power imbalances between researchers and participants, and address these challenges by demonstrating ways of integrating participatory methods into human rights-based research. This approach reflects the principles of anti-oppressive social work when working with vulnerable populations, but at the same time maintains the need for advocacy-focused research.

While on one hand I was struggling to find the most suitable paradigm for my research, I was also becoming more and more aware of what the research shouldn’t be. It shouldn’t be hierarchal, with a colonial mentality reinforcing the dominant; it must not be Eurocentric or tokenistic, and it shouldn’t treat the participants as the other, separate from the research process and interpretation, only to be investigated and observed, but not consulted and involved in the research process or outcomes. I found these sentiments are captured well by Columbian sociologist Fals-Borda (1996), who asserts that neither academia nor knowledge is neutral, and argues that researchers maintain responsibility towards those they study:

Do not monopolise your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your technique, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or /grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them. Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organisations. Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Borda, 1996, p. 179).

Borda argues against the concept that research should be seen as a playground for an academic elite, and I think that his powerful statement encapsulates the essence of the aspirations I had for the research: to honour the cultural and racial plurality of the participants. This is reinforced by Tuhiwai Smith (2012), who suggests that Indigenous societies are often appalled that Western science can desire, extract, and claim ownership
of people’s way of knowing, and then simultaneously reject those people who created those ideas, and deny them the opportunities to be the creators of their culture and own notions.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) were also concerned that western, colonial science did not take into account the basic beliefs of the marginalised communities. The primary focus of their work is on transformative mixed-methods inquiry in diverse communities that prioritizes ethical implications of research and evaluation in support of human rights and social justice.

The transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007; Mertens et al., 2009) presents a framework of belief systems that directly engages members of culturally diverse groups, with a focus on increased social justice. Being firmly rooted in a human rights agenda, the ethical implications of research are derived from the conscious inclusion of a broad range of people who are generally excluded from the mainstream in society. This seemed to sit well with everything I was hoping to achieve, and I started exploring the possibility of conducting the research with a transformative lens.

My reflections brought me back to the work of Freire (1972). Freire sought conscientisation and liberation for oppressed peoples everywhere; he argues the need for the oppressed to become critically aware of their true situation, to intervene and take charge of their destiny. He talks about ‘the culture of silence’ because the masses have no voice and are excluded from any action role in the transformation of their society. Freire was suspicious of researchers who came into communities with more questions than answers, and was adamant that people should study their own contexts and identify the issues important to them. This, he argues, allows people to construct their own knowledge, and to decide for themselves what form of learning they should take as a result.

Crotty (1998) states that Freire’s approach to a society like ours requires that we first identify the forms—often very subtle forms—that oppression takes in a society like ours, and Townsend, (2013), argues that the aspirations of this Freirian approach are therefore both participatory and empowering. This is similar to the argument Mertens (2010) makes, suggesting that the transformative worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics, and a political change agenda, to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs. These insights have inspired me to develop a research process that could lead to a positive change in the lives of the participants, and my own life as a practitioner. Thus, my thoughts led me to a transformative learning model to work with the
South Sudanese community in Western Australia. Mezirow and Tayler (2010) state that transformative learning:

Involves the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning, which entails the identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values and feelings; critically assessing their underlying assumptions; testing their justification through rational discourse; and striving for decisions through consensus building. (p. 3)

Mezirow was influenced by cognitive and developmental psychology, and in particular the influence of Freire’s “theory of transformation which he refers to as *conscientization* or consciousness-raising” (Dirkz, 1998, p. 2). The core elements identified by Mezirow were merged into a transformative learning theory. The elements are:

**Individual experience**—refers to the wide range of mature background experience of adult learners, who have greater opportunities to react as individuals and engage in dialogue and intensive critical reflection and promote transformative learning.

**Critical reflection**—includes the questioning of our deeply held assumptions and beliefs obtained from previous experience. It may involve content reflection on what we perceive, feel and act; or process reflection of how we perform the functions of perceiving; and a reflection of the premises associated with the awareness of what we believe. The questioning of the presuppositions underlying our knowledge of the world.

**Dialogue**—is conducted with self and others examining the “comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness (in relation to norms) or authenticity (in relation to feelings) or of what is being asserted or to question the credibility of the person making the statement (Mezirow, 1991, p. 77)

**Holistic orientation**—involves affective, intuitive thinking, physical and spiritual self and involves feelings and emotions in the reflective process.

**Awareness of context**—includes “surroundings of the immediate learning event, personal and professional situation of the learners at the time (their prior
experience) and the background context that is shaping society” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12)

**Authentic relationships**—involve the meaningful and genuine relationships among the learners so that transformation may occur.

Thus, the theoretical orientation to transformative learning involves personal transformation and growth, critical individual reflection, emphasising the self-critique of deeply held assumptions, leading to greater personal awareness in relationship to others. All this within the larger understanding which sees “transformative learning as being as much about social change as personal transformation where individual and social transformation are inherently linked. Critical reflection in this orientation is more about ideological critique, where learners develop an awareness of power and greater agency (political consciousness) to transform society and their own reality” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 3).

Thus, transformative learning is very much at the heart of my own experiences, practices, feelings and emotions and forms the basis for engaging with the South Sudanese community in this research study.

To do this I was drawn to action research as a methodology for this study. As Somekh (1995) suggests, action research can push boundaries and generate knowledge with transformative power.

### 3.3 Action research model

In my own work, I found that initiatives driven by the community itself were the ones that people were most effective at dealing with in their own ways, with their own solutions. I was therefore keen to explore if research using that approach was possible. The most suitable process where people were actively involved with the research appears to be the action research model. As stated in Chapter 1:

Action research is methodology which acknowledges that people who have experienced historic oppression hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences. Action research is necessarily participatory enabling all people affected by the issue to have their voices heard and be actively engaged in research activities (Stringer, 2014).
This idea of research enabling people to act mirrored the framework I use as a practitioner, so it was very appealing to be able to marry both research and practice at the same time. Whitehead and McNiff (2006, p. 13) argue that in action research, the focus swings away from the spectator/researcher and into the practitioner/researcher. Practitioners investigate their own practice, observe, describe and explain what they are doing in company of one another, and produce their own explanations for what they are doing, and why they are doing it.

With this research, not only could I critically reflect on how I was working from a practitioner perspective, but action research would also allow me to be guided by the community to better understand their perspectives. The partnership approach appealed to me, as it not only addressed the issues around power-based relationships, but also provided me with a way of directly engaging participants with an increased focus on social justice. Writers such as Tuhiwai Smith (2012) parallel research as a metaphor for colonialism, when the Western scientific researcher maintains the hegemonic positions, marginalising, rather than involving, people in the process. In contrast, action research is about allowing the people’s voices to be heard. As a result, I selected the action research methodology to investigate the beliefs and fears held by the South Sudanese community here in Western Australia.

Stringer (2014) suggests that the basic action research routine provides a simple yet powerful framework - Look, Think, Act (see Figure 3.3) that enables people to commence their inquiries in a straightforward manner and build greater detail into procedures as the complexity of issues increases.

![Figure 3.3. Stringer's basic action research model.](image-url)
In this research, I wanted the basic action research routine to include repeated cycles of investigation; the first involved acquiring information on the topic. My previous research with disadvantaged people and from personal observation, both within my own Department as well as with leaders in the South Sudanese Refugee Camp in Kenya, made a great impact on me, and I began to identify important issues of expectation and concerns. This was the starting point for Cycle 1

**Cycle 1**

**Look:** The starting point; identifying the significant elements that make up the people’s experiences.

**Think:** After reflecting on the information gathered, participants having the opportunity to describe their experience and present their perspective on the issues faced.

**Act:** Begin considering effective solutions to improve the situation. Facilitate group discussions to start suggesting potential ideas which would begin to start supporting group members.

The views obtained from the experiences in this Cycle were adopted and became the basis for the second Cycle

**Cycle 2**

**Look:** Revisit elements discussed in the first cycle. Consider if all other information has been acquired to support previous discussions on the subject. If any actions have happened between cycles, reflect on how they have impacted on people’s problems.

**Think:** Check with group members if the full extent of the situation is captured and identify other issues which might be compounding people’s problems. Check if there are other opportunities to create change.

**Act:** Together move to create some practical steps which tackle the issues and move towards creating resolutions.
The remaining cycles follow the same pattern and build upon the results and experiences gained in previous cycles.

The refined version of the action research model, as used in this research, is explained in the next chapter.

This chapter has emphasised the theoretical framework of my research, Departmental policies, as well as an overview of the transformative learning theory and the importance of using an action research model. The next chapter focuses on the engagement process of the research, the interview procedure and analysis method.
Chapter 4 The research process

4.1 Engagement
The engagement part of action research is a crucial as highlighted by Stringer (2014, p.92):

A brief interview or conversation does not provide sufficient information to enable people to develop deep-seated understandings necessary to outcomes of the research process. Interviews and focus groups should provide all participants with extended opportunities to explore and express their experience of the acts, activities, events and issues related to the problem investigated.

To begin the process, I was privileged to have the opportunity to partner with the elected WA South Sudanese President of Western Australia, Akuot Aciek, and work with him to guide and direct how he thought the research should proceed. He was recently elected with over 450 votes received from South Sudanese community members against his nearest opponent receiving 436 votes. As I proceeded with the research I heard many positive comments supporting his vision for the future of the community, which I felt emphasised the importance people placed on his role in community.

Initially, I had several meetings with him checking that my research proposal was in line with his views as the leader. Because he was supportive of my intent, he helped guide and shape the wording, so that participants would understand what I was trying to achieve. He then linked me to male and female community leaders who were willing to participate and express their views. It was when I heard statements like this one that I realised that without his support, I would have missed a whole range of key participants:

I spoke to (Participant 38) about the research and she said she was terrified. She said she didn’t want to talk to anyone from the Department for Child Protection but after you went there she called me and said she was happy you sat together.  
( Participant 1 South Sudanese President WA)

I reflect now that perhaps if I did not have Akuot Aciek’s support and other key community members to carry out this research, I would never have reached participants like this woman, and others like her. I also note that, although he had a high number of votes, there are also many people who did not vote for him. I am unaware of the voting preferences of the research participants, which means I am unsure if the research would have different outcomes if the opposing candidate had been successfully elected.
As well as links in community I also had my own existing networks of organisations which enabled purposeful snowball sampling to draw on community organisations such as the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, the Edmund Rice Centre, ISHAR Women’s Health, WA Police and City of Stirling.

Altogether 45 South Sudanese participants were involved in the study, with twice as many women as men taking part. It is important to note that since I had previously had dealings with more male elected leaders than females, here I wanted to capture feedback from a diverse cross section of family members. 29 individual interviews were carried out, with an almost equal gender balance of 15 females and 14 males. The focus groups had 16 female participants, but no males, since they expressed a desire only to have individual conversations. Participants came from a range of 13 tribes, with the largest representations from the Acholi and Dinka tribes. All participants lived in the metropolitan area of Perth at the time of the interviews and were over the age of 18 when they came to Australia as humanitarian entrants.

Participants were interviewed over a six-month period starting in April 2017, at a number of venues depending on their preferences, ranging from community centres and offices to their homes.

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<td>Dinka</td>
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**Figure 4.1 Research participants**

From the outset, I recognised how important it was for me to try and untangle myself as the known Specialist Community Child Protection Worker and be clear that I was interviewing as a researcher. To alleviate participant’s concerns, I started interviews by talking about my role as a researcher, and outline what I was hoping to achieve. I explained how I wanted to carry out interviews which facilitated and encouraged the flow of information in a culturally respectful and sensitive manner. I also used a lot of humour, wherever appropriate, to put participants at ease, and point out the heaviness of my Scottish accent compared to the heavy South Sudanese accents.

On one occasion a participant was talking about young people, and I thought he was saying that rustling offered a good opportunity to positively bring young people together. I wrote it down and said I’d like to know more about rustling, thinking it was a technique to talk meaningfully with young people. In fact, I picked up the wrong word altogether, which should have been wrestling, and we laughed as he said he thought I had said something entirely different to him that had a different meaning too.

I also noted in research by Losoncz (2013) that she had used her experiences of being in Kakuma Refugee Camp as an ice-breaker when meeting participants, and I copied this idea. I found it put people at ease, using my Kakuma experience to strike up a conversation, and people seemed genuinely interested to find out why I had travelled there and what I thought of the experience.
After I felt I there was enough trust to start the process I asked for informed consent to interview, and for permission to make audio recordings either individually, in focus groups or both. I spoke about wishing to gain an understanding of their perspectives of the Department and to seek ideas around what appropriate models of care might look like. Each participant was given a copy of the Participant Information Form and a Participants Consent Form, both of which I offered to have translated. I was also conscious of Kabranian-Melkonian (2015) highlighting that researchers may struggle acquiring informed consent because some cultures regard signing a document as a dangerous matter. Again, I clarified the process I had been involved in, and mentioned how the leaders had given me permission to do this research, and offered to come back at a later stage if they wanted to consult further with their own leaders or friends before proceeding. I was aware of poor literacy levels in many of the smaller tribal communities, like Losoncz (2013, p. 12) who suggests all significant social transactions are conducted orally and in their first language, with no written forms.

To be respectful, I felt it was important for the participants to set the pace of the interview, which involved story telling using their own narratives and experiences. Because of this I found interviews averaged 90 minutes, and the focus groups lasted approximately 3 hours. Each focus group was attended by a community leader with previous experience in providing support to people in the community. Their role was to guide the course of the focus group discussion and develop the feedback loop to drive the research. Although I was keen to ensure a trusted community leader was part of each focus group, I also acknowledge that this may have silenced group members or affected their responses in a group setting. All participants spoke English well so interpreters were only required in one focus group. Times spent with community members in workshops or residential camps were not audio recorded, but written up in reflective journals and notes about the ever-changing situations I found myself in.

On completion of my interviews and as I wrote up a draft of my thesis, I went back to many South Sudanese participants to check that I have accurately captured their thoughts and ideas. Research outcomes should be "disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood." (Tuihiwai Smith, 2012, p. 15). I revisited a focus group to present my work, and on that occasion a women’s leader asked that I remove some terminology when they called me a mzungu (often used when describing white tourists is Africa) telling me this was just a fun name and shouldn’t be
picked up in an academic thesis, in case it was taken out of context. There were a few changes participants asked me to make along the way, but overall, people seemed happy with the findings.

I have also presented my preliminary findings to a range of agencies who have an interest in hearing the outcomes. This includes agencies and government departments all with an active service delivery interest in CaLD matters. The exciting part for me is that the South Sudanese President of WA, as well as other South Sudanese members, have offered to co-present this research to community, service providers and key decision makers, which I think shows how this is seen as a true partnership approach, and makes the messaging more powerful that I could ever achieve on my own.

Now the research has been completed, our first joint presentation is planned for September 2018 to the social work staff at King Edwards Hospital and the President; I hope to submit a conference abstract for the Australian Institute of Family Studies Annual Conference in July 2019.

4.4 Analysis methods
After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed from audio to text, then imported into NVivo qualitative and data analysis software and stored in chronological order. I started coding after each interview, loosely grouping those codes into themes to try and understand some of the terminology participants were using.

I found the analysis component of NVivo helpful to navigate the narrative nature, picking out the themes and patterns of the interviews. It was easy to remember the more traumatic accounts of war, and then overlook some of the key themes or more subtle content that I might have missed. I found NVivo a good tool for me to conceptualise some of the topics, and I started to see a pattern of deeper conversations happening as the cycles developed. I realise how the initial interviews were fairly one dimensional and slightly superficial. As I reflected, refined and moved along, I developed a combination of more insightful questioning and as more trust was established so more meaningful discussions took place.
4.5 Limitations of the study

I acknowledge my researcher’s position as an employee of the Department can be considered as a limitation to the study, knowing the concerns many South Sudanese families have about the Department. Baird et al. (2015) also highlights how South Sudanese culture have respect and reverence for authority figures, and how it would be considered disrespectful to act as equal to someone in a position of status. I would consider I experienced both attitudes from participants, and found that I had to continually reflect on my own subjectivity of how I understood participants’ experiences and the influence of my own bias. One of the other limitations of my study is the small number of participants, whose variety of perspectives and experiences do not represent all South Sudanese families in Australia; a larger size sample would likely have provided a broader range of perspectives.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the process of the evaluation of documentation and content of the interview and focus group guides was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Western Australia (Approval Number RA/4/1/8836). A copy of documentation is included as an appendix.
Chapter 5 The research process

5.1 Action research model
I now outline how my action research model developed as the cycles were implemented. From the general model of the action research process, discussed in Section 3.3, the following diagram provides an outline of the action research used in the present study.

![Action research model diagram](image)

Figure 5.1 Action research model (adapted)

5.2 Cycle 1 - Look
I will be ready to help you. Let's do this from the bottom up. I can help you with your thesis and maybe we can tell the story to the Commissioner for Children together. This is not paper work to stay on a shelf. (Participant 1, South Sudanese President WA)

At the start of my research, I was delighted to find I had so much interest from leaders, community members, my university supervisor and work colleagues who were all supportive of my action research proposal. Looking back on my starting point though, I realise how naive I was in my initial thinking. I had written up a full literature review on collectivism and kinship care, had met with key leaders, and thought the perfect way of operating would be to work in groups in a collectivist approach. My action research cycles would effectively allow community members to have a voice, and I further imagined working
alongside the WA South Sudanese President, bringing groups of people together. We would highlight the need to have community carers; I could invite Departmental staff from the Foster Care Directorate to set up recruitment workshops, and from there we would start looking to start the process. However, by the second interview I realised that community members had very different ideas:

If something happens we can report it to you. We can report other families not looking after their children we can report it to you. We have to follow the law of this country…… I really appreciate that we South Sudanese need to be under the umbrella of the Australian system while we are here. (Participant 2 Annuak male)

Rather than the starting point being discussing community care, this participant clearly thought I had ulterior motives altogether, wanting to know if there were issues of child protection happening in his community. The next participant went on to tell me about how much South Sudanese parents were afraid of the Department:

It is worth appreciating we are facing a lot of challenges and coming from a different culture and coming to individualistic culture. There is a lot of us struggling especially with the children and the parents here and the parents here find it difficult and that brings a lot of conflict in the family. Parents feel they have become powerless. Once DCP comes in that is more fearful and the children will be taken away. (Participant 4 Acholi male)

I was starting to hear the power differentials between the researcher (myself) and the participant first hand in this interview, and becoming acutely aware that I was going to struggle as an insider researcher, balancing my role as a researcher while working in the Department at the same time. Herr (2015, p. 137) highlights the complexity for insiders carrying out action research being in multiple simultaneous roles: their professional roles for which they are employed as well as the added role of being a researcher. Here was I, with multiple layers of power and privilege, not only as a Departmental practitioner within a Western child protection system, but also a white Anglo-Celtic, with a background full of traditional Eurocentric values.

This was compounded by the fact that participants were all black South Sudanese, and this started throwing up personal issues for me. I had previously attended a seminar titled Courageous Conversations about Race (Singleton, 2015). Singleton challenged us to consider ourselves in terms of racial privilege and cultural dominance. I found it interesting when he talked at length about how many White people are unconscious of their privilege. This is also discussed by Young (2004), who argues that social work practices are formed from a worldview derived from theories developed in the United Kingdom and the United
States of America, suggesting that Whiteness is the default position in social work theory. Young argues that, while we might try to understand the history of social work born out of a colonial enterprise, we do not often confront the personal culpability of inherited Whiteness itself. A good starting point, she suggests, is realising complicity in Whiteness, and to critically reflect, understand, and develop tools which dismantle oppressive or colonial actions.

It seemed clear to me that my methodology, however well-meaning my intentions, still comes from a position of privilege, and that I was becoming very aware I would need to continually interrogate my position. I realised that I work for a Department which ultimately has the legislated power to remove children from their families. To complicate the situation even more, Tempany (2009) reports on the disempowerment of Sudanese participants, and suggests that research might not be valid if there is a lack of trust in the researcher which I was also beginning to realise in the interviews:

So now there is a big big problem facing South Sudanese families. They are angry because they don’t see the Department of Child Protection helping but that they are actually destroying their children. They see it as DCP has set up a system to separate them from their children’. (Participant 6 Dinka male)

By the time I met the third participant, I realised that feelings of fear and powerlessness were going to run throughout the interviews, and thought that these were the issues that needed to be addressed before I could begin talking about community care. If participants were feeling that the Department was separating parents from children, discussing community care was not going to address these deep concerns; on the contrary, I thought this could reinforce that belief. Many of these early interviews were focusing on how powerless community members felt as parents:

I know that a lot of people are struggling with their kids. They want everything they can know to make things right. They just want that information about what they can do. (Participant 11 Bari Female)

Thinking about power and privilege led me to Tuhiwai Smith (2012) work on decolonizing research. In this work, she explores how, while undertaking research either across cultures or within a minority culture, it is critical that researchers recognise the power dynamic that is embedded in the relationship with their subjects. It was very apparent to me at that point that I needed to find a way to constantly revisit the research process, and reflect on my position right the way through. I was also starting to pick up on lots of anger throughout the
interviews, anger and frustration at the Department. I was the face of someone who represented government, so on occasions the interviews became very personal:

……kids they lie, no matter what they lie. So this is not gonna work. Been a problem, been a big issue, everybody hate DCP. People feel they have been targeted by you people. (Participant 36 Luo female)

While I found these types of conversations to be tough, on the other hand they gave me a real insight into the kind of statements being made, and rumours circulating about the Department, and WA Police. There was anger at the thought of government being involved in any family, and a perception that parents are not listened to or respected. This seemed to be the experience community members referred to as they quoted examples of when they felt children were unjustly removed:

Yeah, the children I know are not from Sudan but yes African kids. They were taken away by DCP because the parents had to work and do not look after the children. (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

I was sometimes tempted to launch into a debate, stating the Department would not remove a child merely because a parent worked long hours, and that there must have been more risk factors. Instead, I stopped, and realised that the underlying theme was that the parent felt powerless, and that this story had spread throughout the community. This rumour would further worry parents; as Losoncz (2013, p. 244) reports, parents feel attacked in their parenting roles, destroying their authority and feeling confused about the intent and interventions by care and protection authorities. At the other end of the spectrum, participants made statements saying that even after children were removed, the Department then made them dysfunctional:

If you go to community you will realise the South Sudanese gives you guys a zero rating. Children removed are abused by carers and come back helpless on the street taking drugs or in jail. The parent says Child Protection can take them back because those children are dead. We don’t want those children anymore. (Participant 15 Dinka male)

Deng (2016) states in his research that he found parents were telling him that children were unfairly removed into the care of Child Protection, but report that these children are now languishing on streets and in prisons. My challenge now was to think of how I could acknowledge this statement as a worker, to move from a zero rating to at least reaching a number one in the rating scale, in the eyes of community members.

I now reflect on this interview, and think that I should have explored these statements more. I was taken aback when he said children were ‘dead’, since this seems such a powerful
statement to make; but I should have asked more. Did he mean dead to him personally, or dead to the community, or dead in spirit? This statement had a big impact on me, not only as a worker, but it also highlighted the complexity I faced trying to untangle myself from being a worker, and move into being a researcher. When I reread the transcripts, and listened to the interviews again, I could hear how participants were responding to me as a Departmental representative, and not as a researcher, and I realised that I would have to constantly try and address this throughout the research.

5.3 Cycle 1 - Think

While reflecting on how I might try to move forward in Cycle 1, I came across the work of Brookfield (2014), who discusses incorporating personal narratives of Whiteness into anti-racist practice. He draws on his upbringing with Whites in Britain, in a world of Whiteness, and explains how he thought the natural order of all things was White. Brookfield also talks about how he previously thought story telling or narrative was essentially fictional, but explains how, over time, he found that listening and using narratives was one of the most compelling pedagogic approaches he discovered. Brookfield describes how skill and empathy can be used to avert racism by using deep listening.

McNiff (2012) also suggests the very nature of action research is based on people telling their stories. She explains how life histories can be used as a means of talking truth to confront power, because they enable us to contextualise the stories we are told, and to understand them from the perspective of the story teller.

The reason my interviews were lasting 90 minutes was because of the story telling style of the participants; each person was a unique individual with a personal story to tell. Every participant had a story and wanted to be heard, be validated and I realised I hadn’t given enough thought on the telling of their stories:

Then we had a prayer that night, slept together with my mum and then the following day early in the morning, we caught a train from Khartoum and it was the saddest day of my life. I was so unhappy. Two of my colleagues were killed. We didn't know where they were. My mum refused to come with us – she refused to leave the country (Participant 5 Bari female)

Stories like this one were where people focused on their experiences, and I felt they wanted me to hear their stories of their journeys to Australia, and events that were triggered in their lives to become refugees. Stringer (2014, p. 109) warns that research facilitators should ensure participants are given the maximum opportunity to present events and phenomena in their own terms, and follow their own agendas instead of those established by the
researcher. He argues that the action research process is designed to provide well-grounded understandings of the experience and perspective of participants. Indeed, I realised that my questions jumped straight to models of community care, which meant I had not created room for people to talk and share their stories. I was focusing on South Sudanese children already being placed in the care system, but had to change my agenda and build-in time for more narrative. At that point I realised that I needed to take several steps back, let the research develop more organically, and at the pace of the participants, as they wanted to talk about their own life experiences:

I have seen things I shouldn’t have seen when I was a kid. I have been affected a lot more than other kids. I have seen people hanging from strings and all that. You go to psychologists, they don’t give you any sort of medicines, they just let you talk. There is no pills, no nothing. But why do psychologists get paid? It’s because they listen. (Participant 32 Nuer male)

This disturbing story shared similarities with many other stories, as participants spoke about the traumas encountered in their homeland. Their stories of home, loss and sadness were consistent throughout the study. I found that the levels of distress people had when sharing their experiences meant that I had to be very careful in managing the interview process, by using empathy and deep listening skills. I was conscious to balance offering empathy and listening, but acutely aware of trying to not re-traumatising by retelling some of these accounts.

In their paper on narratives and silences with refugees, Puvimanasinghe, Denson, Augoustinos & Somasundaram (2015) highlight the importance of using storytelling as a means of reconstructing refugees’ identities, to encompass their losses, embrace new environments, and to position themselves between home and host cultures. They suggest that it is essential for interviewers and researchers to create adequate space for people to tell their stories at their own pace, in a manner most conducive to them. They urge to move beyond words to listen to blank spaces of the stories untold.

The blanks I could hear might be a silence, when I saw the person reliving a traumatic experience or reflecting on how life was back home. It felt like silences were just as important to hold as much as the story itself:

For no reason they just liked to kill, dead bodies, no head, you don’t know even where the head was taken, they just kill. (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

On occasions, I had to stop interviews to console, to offer support, or suggest accessing professional counselling services. One woman showed me photos on her smart phone of
dismembered bodies, slain in the previous month back home. It had been sent as an update about the current situation of war; but she also pointed out that she also saw it as a veiled threat to her and her family members still living in South Sudan. I turned to my line manager for debriefing at this point, since I found I was starting to struggle.

I was aware of Pittaway et al (2010) suggesting that the power imbalances between researchers and refugee participants raise complex ethical issues, and researchers are often perceived as having the power to effect change. I realised there was nothing I could do to make political changes, here, or in South Sudan, and I was also wondering how far removed from talking about community care was, considering these traumatic backgrounds. I tried to imagine how a family previously faced with such extremes must feel when they were contacted by a Departmental case worker to discuss parenting concerns. The stories seemed so awful and far removed from life in Perth so I asked participants if professional counselling services were ever considered:

   We are so traumatised. We are not happy at all, even you see us smile but no family is happy. It’s just inside us, that’s something in the community that we don’t go for counselling we don’t talk to anyone, we just, we are depressed, sometimes we develop blood pressure, like me, I used not to have blood pressure but I developed it here. Our people are depressed but we don’t say it out, but within community we know, even if we take it to Australians what are they gonna do? (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

It appeared that talking to strangers about problems is a very Western approach in dealing with trauma, and not something individuals were inclined to consider. Lewig, Arney and Salveron, (2010) suggest that although once refugees come to Australia they have access to trauma counselling, many mainstream services have an inadequate level of understanding of the needs of refugees to effectively provide such services. I found a several participants who shrugged off the idea of accessing counsellors, saying that they saw no merit in the idea; but I did find that I became progressively aware of more trauma issues as each interview progressed:

   The body is just a body but we are death inside, we are a dead body moving. Not for us here, but for all the Sudanese community, we are just suffering here, our soul, our spirit is just finished. (Participant 19 Balanda female)

I found talking about the soul and spirit finishing here in Australia disturbing, having experienced firsthand the environment of the refugee camp many of the participants came from. Tempany (2009) highlights that psychological measures have been developed by Westerners based on dominant assumptions and norms:
Take the issue of mental health; if you talk about it is just like you have whispered into the wind and it means that everybody has heard you. Words get carried around and everyone gets to hear gets to hear & everyone knows. It makes you weaker and there are things like contemplating suicide. (Participant 38 Dinka male)

Schweitzer, Greeenslade and Kagee, (2007) acknowledges that most refugees have had no formal assistance from mental health professionals and, instead, have adapted to the various stressors by other means. While some were finding coping mechanisms within community, it was hard for me to comprehend people coming from war zones to start a new life, but still worrying that their extended family was under such threat. They seemed to be experiencing a whole new set of family problems:

There is certain traditional things we do with the family, but here at the age of 16, 15, they are going smoking, for drugs for things, we just we didn’t experience at home. And now they are running away. (Participant 23 Nuer female)

Because of the seriousness of the feedback I was hearing, I drew on recommendations made by Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei (2011), stressing the importance of developing a relational approach, ensuring participants are given respect and are protected from harm. When I felt interviews were becoming overwhelming, I offered referral pathways to professional services specialising in supporting refugee families. I also offered to make linkage to other workshops or support groups I knew of, which were community driven, in response to topics such as parent/teen conflict.

My thoughts in this final stage of Cycle 1 were to let the action research develop at a pace set by participants. Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 130) argues that often in community research, the method and methodology can be far more important than the outcome. Processes should be respectful to enable people to heal, and not negate indigenous knowledge. I was struggling on many levels, thinking about the multiple factors impacting on the South Sudanese community members, and how their issues were playing out in their everyday lives.

5.4 Cycle 1 - Act

The demand for action came from several participants, who wanted to set up community education workshops about child protection and find out more about the Department. Losoncz (2013, p. 245) reports Sudanese parents have misunderstandings about the purpose, appropriateness and values of interventions from government authorities, and suggests that Australian government agencies would benefit from exploring and implementing a range of strategies to clarify their aims and purpose to families:
Sometimes in the community, Child Protection should come and address our people and let them listen. Our people could set up the meeting. When they come and then everyone knows what is going on. Sometimes the people think Child Protection can take my kids. Come with others. Bring your boss man. You need to talk to the people. It is good to have a relationship with the people.’ (Participant 7 Luo male)

Deng and Marlowe (2013) found Sudanese parents settling in New Zealand struggled with the disparities between parenting in New Zealand and South Sudan. They urge services to work collaboratively and develop education workshops which are responsive to the needs of the community. This seemed like a good starting point, and is also consistent with Sawrikar’s recommendations, who stresses how critical it is that caseworkers should educate migrant groups about child protection laws, since it is unlikely they will be aware of them (Sawrikar, 2017). She further suggests that this is carried out in a non-judgmental way, so they do not feel belittled or inferior. Many participants asked for similar sessions, so I thought that might seem to be a good way to start moving forward:

What I’d recommend there needs to be a lot of work with the parents information sessions on how life is supposed to be. Even people coming in 2005, most of them have settled but single parents are still struggling who came with their kids. (Participant 4 Acholi male)

Although I was happy to respond to this request, and mobilise service providers, I also knew many participants had already attended similar workshops. Over the years I have set up information sessions alongside WA Police, and while we tried to create space to have group discussions, it often resulted in heated confrontation between government staff and community members arguing about the rights and wrongs of Australian law. How could it be different this time? Parents seemed to feel disempowered, and although they were asking for information, on another level I think they were asking for facts on what the Department called the bottom line before intervention takes place. How can they parent their children without fear of Departmental involvement? How can they be left alone to parent their children?

I went back, listened again to the interviews more carefully, and while I heard repeated appeals from parents to hold information sessions, I heard the pleas for help:

There is a fear, yeah, definitely a fear that parents lose their authority as parents and the children, I mean yeah there has been cases of kids threatening their parents, like if you don’t buy me an iPad I will call the police. They think children are supported through DCP and they can get their teachers at school to report on them. So there is sense of like constant surveillance and an attack on the family almost. (Participant 9 Dinka female)
How can parents be better informed without feeling the responses are tokenistic? In her research, Losoncz (2013) argues that by simply informing Sudanese parents about Australian parenting values and family law is not enough for them to adequately transform their parenting skills, and to better respond to the challenges of the new cultural environment. She suggests that authorities should confer with parents, youth and elders to find shared understandings about parenting. This workshop gave me the opportunity to visit those ideas and ask why they thought there were so many challenges to parenting in Australia:

We don't hear from you guys if a child has been abused. We don't hear from police if a real bad thing has happened so how do we know anything? (Participant 36 Madi male)

To try and ensure this new workshop was more relevant and responsive to these concerns, I set up several meetings with the community leaders, so they were setting the agenda, driving the session and providing the content. They set the meeting for a Saturday afternoon at the local recreation centre to attract maximum community participation, and spoke to community members about the intent of the workshop. My job was to ensure that the service providers requested by the community would attend so I spoke to the agencies and ensured that appropriate staff members could come. I organised catering, interpreters and room hire. Leaders were given flyers to be passed on to community members. I was invited to talk at community functions about my role in the workshop, and emails were circulated advertising the event (See Appendix 5.4.1)

On the day of the workshop 80 people came along, with an additional 20 arriving just as proceedings were concluding after 3 hours. Despite the workshop being on a weekend, which is outside of core office hours, we still managed to secure senior staff from the Department, WA Police, Ngala, Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, City of Stirling, the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Communities for Children.

The leaders, in conjunction with their community members, set the agenda, asking for senior staff from the Department and WA Police to talk about child protection and the law. This first half was planned as an information session, and the second half was going to focus on developing an action plan. Personally, I was still uneasy, since both police and my manager were white males talking ‘at’ community. Fortunately, the feedback after the event was very positive about this:
Look Saturday was good according to community because DCP and police are responding to the concerns of the South Sudanese community. When we started talking some people came to bring their grievances. I would tell our people.....look.....when I see police I am very happy. They are trained to reinforce the law and they are not enemies. Their job is to stop people breaking the law. There should be a connection between DCP and police and us. It is a very good thing. (Participant 25 male Azande)

Questions to my manager and WA police were interesting, because some queried the notion of assaulting ones’ child. While police stressed it was not appropriate to assault anyone, there were several people who asked for more detail about the terminology of the word assault. Did that mean to attack someone so hard as to cause a bloody injury? Or was that equivalent to smacking a child? Would that person be arrested if they smacked? Clarifying the meaning of words has been raised previously as a concern, but I think that, as practitioners, we respond to queries about language by suggesting using interpreter services for better communication if a point needs clarifying. However, I think it goes wider than that, and, as Khawaja, White, Schweitzer and Greenslade (2008) note, language is a key factor for environmental mastery, providing a means of integration through communication, and enhancing understanding between two cultures.

The language is a problem. I’ve realised that Police or anyone in Australia think Africans are bad and they beat their children. We are not beating them. We maybe smack like .....can’t you listen..... but we call it a beating. But it’s not beating like Australians think like really bad. We don’t hurt our children but the word beating makes people think we do. (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

There were occasions where I interrupted the flow of conversation to ask for clarity on the topic. For example, many times parents talked about the need to put children down if they misbehaved, and I wondered what that meant. Was it striking a child to the ground? Or was it more symbolic?

Put them down to talk, that’s what we mean. Yeah, put the child down, sit down, let us talk. (Participant 21 Bari Female)

Moving into the second half of the session, and developing an action plan, became very chaotic, as people were keen to have the microphone and wanted to share their own thoughts. It was clear that there was not enough time in one session to hear from everyone who wanted to talk, and to develop any sort of planned set of actions:

I didn’t come to the Saturday one but I heard from other people good feedback. This should have been happening long before the people are where they are now. Some people are struggling and have problems with their children. Are there going to be more chances for people to talk? (Participant 33 Pojulu female)
The reason these types of sessions are not currently running is that, by all accounts, South Sudanese community members are settled after living in Western Australia for approximately the last ten years. This means that they are no longer entitled to settlement services, which support humanitarian entrants. As service providers, I think we now have a duty to raise these concerns at strategic levels, to highlight the complexities that these families are still facing.

5.5 Cycle 2 - Look

Moving into the next cycle, I revisited some descriptions of action research conceptualised as a series of cycles reflecting, planning, and evaluating. I was finding it hard to break my research into distinct cycles, because there seemed to be a series of multiple mini cycles happening at the same time. It was evident that the participants were facing a multitude of complexities, a phenomenon identified by Hashimoto and Govindasamy (2011), whom, in their research with Sudanese women in Western Sydney, suggest that almost every aspect of culture experienced by Sudanese arrivals in Australia is different to that of Sudan. They argue that this forces them to cope with changes in language, social structures, expectations and values.

With so many factors at play and so much data being generated during the individual interviews, and the larger workshop itself, I was struggling to find a way to move forward which would capture the needs of everyone. Stringer (2014) refers to this challenge, highlighting how action research can throw up not just one issue that needs action, but multiple related issues that need to be prioritised. Some participants wanted to talk more, some wanted workshops while others wanted action. Fassinger and Morrow (2013) suggests that focus groups are a useful way of engaging members of a community in communal meaning making, building community support, empowering participants, and maintaining congruence with communal values held in many collectivist communities. The priorities which I thought might be the key drivers for action may not necessarily match the expectation of the participant so I wondered about setting up focus groups to reach a consensus:

We have a collective culture where everyone is connected. It is simple we don’t have times where someone sits by themselves. If I’m stressed I go to my friends and that is good for my mental health because I sit and talk. I’m connected with my people.
(Participant 17 Pojulu male)

Wilkinson (1998) explains how feminist researchers found it was positive to establish focus groups as they tried to shift the balance of power away from the researcher, towards the
research participants, avoiding the chance of exploitation. This increases the power of the community member in relation to the researcher and, adhering to the principles of feminist research, improves the researcher’s understanding of the opinions and lived experiences of the participants. This seems a logical next step to try and gain some group agreements on the next steps to take. I also thought that focus groups might capture multiple perspectives in collective conversations, and help create more dialogue and debate around their own critical matters:

Yeah you know we South Sudanese community have been forced from our country, we came here but the children and our culture is finished and the doctor cannot even get it. Now our kids are running away and we are all being split up. (Participant 19 Balanda female)

Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2011) highlights how focus groups or group interviews have been important pedagogical sites and instruments throughout history. He recognises focus groups as sites where pedagogy, politics, and inquiry intersect, yielding powerful knowledge and insights, suggesting that the data is seldom produced through individual interviewing. The goal of the educator within study circles or focus groups is to engage with people in their lived realities, producing and transforming them. Freire (1972) spent significant time in communities trying to understand community members’ interests, and identify issues important to them. He found that by working with people to study their own contexts allowed communities to construct their own knowledge, and guide their own actions.

To find out if focus groups might be a useful next step to take, I consulted with some of the participants and community leaders. The male participants asked for further individual interviews to talk more about certain topics; but I found the women’s leaders were very keen to come together as a group:

Let me talk to the other lady leaders and meet together. People want an opportunity to talk what they have in their heart, you know or what their problems are they are going through. They are happy. They have been asking to talk for a while. (Participant 8, Acholi Female)

During Cycle 2, I formed three focus groups to identify a range of topics that participants thought were significant issues they were facing as a community. Most participants had attended the larger workshop, and gave varied feedback on whether they found them beneficial or not. To start each group, I explained the focus of my research as outlined in my methodology chapter; but I wanted them to drive the conversations. We started with some light refreshments, small talk, and then moved to the following open-ended
questions: What are your biggest worries as parents? What are your thoughts on how the Department for Child Protection works? Do you think community care is a good idea?

You know our culture is different from the Australian one. You cry because it is very hard to see children smoking and drinking after you carry a child for nine months. I think it is important that we take the culture back for the kids. (Participant 12 Bari female)

Our old culture doesn’t work here anymore. (Participant 40 Bari female)

Over the years, I have been invited to graduations, birthdays, weddings, community celebrations, and felt a depth of kindness offered by African families who knew very little about me. To think that they now felt their culture was dying and didn’t work here anymore seemed such a sad statement to make. Deng (2016) outlines parents’ concerns about children losing their culture, arguing that this has had profound impact on South Sudanese families. Parents report high levels of distress, anxiety, and powerlessness as they believe authorities listen to children, but that they are not equally acknowledged or listened to. Similar to the previous plea for more education around parenting, there are also calls for the Department to hear the importance families place on culture:

We need from you to give us the chance to look after our children, let them listen to us. We need our children to know our culture they are not respecting us now. If we try and talk to them and you are trying to be tough they say they will call the police and they have power. That pain comes straight into my heart. (Participant 13 Bari female)

I found during the individual interviews that participants were pleading to be heard as parents, and I sensed their feelings of disempowerment. Gustafson and Iluebbey (2013) report that tensions are created when refugee parents believe that their traditional ways of disciplining children in their country of origin worked. Now it appears that they feel powerless to control their children, since they are not allowed to use physical punishment:

It is affecting us that children don’t listen to us. We are powerless you know. We feel now…what is our role as parents? You talk to your son or daughter and they don’t listen but DCP talks to them and they listen. (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

Culture is the first thing. It is how we raise our children. Some of our young people here are destroying themselves. They are losing their culture. (Participant 6 Male Dinka)

Participants stressed the importance of culture, and linked it to the need to retain culture for future generations and I began to realise how important culture is for them and how it plays a central role for the individual, family and community. The conversation about the importance of culture moved into talking about the topic of respect, and both seemed clearly connected. Deng (2016) suggests that respect is intertwined with culture, language and identity, something parents expect their children to embrace. Teaching children to give
respect to others is one of the most important roles of Sudanese parents, and it was repeatedly highlighted by participants:

They (children) also respect our culture so when someone brings you the water you kneel down but not in other cultures. When a visitor comes if the girl she can prepare the water for the visitor. It is not just given to you like that. You have to kneel down…. who prepares the water kneels down and this is our respect. (Participant 7 Luo male)

In her research, Losoncz (2013, p.104) found that the principles most frequently identified by participants as unique to their conceptualisation were respectful treatment, reverence for parents and other adults and elders in the larger family and observance of genders roles in families and in the community:

Respect is important. 100% in our culture. That is the way we teach our children. (Participant 8 Acholi female)

Deng (2016) suggests that South Sudanese parents believe their values are being eroded and feel strongly that their children have no respect because of the Australian freedoms. Deng also finds that parents feel as if their children are losing their traditional cultural values, even as he argues respect is the most integral part of South Sudanese culture:

Respect is huge in the culture because it is saying you have lost your identity as a human being if you don't have respect. Like, that is how much value attached to it. (Participant 9 Dinka female)

5.6 Cycle 2 - Think

To move into the thinking part of Cycle 2, I reread Stringer’s (2017) definition:

The think stage uses interpretive processes to distill the information gathered, identify key features and to interpret and render understandable the problematic experiences being considered. (p. 137)

He suggests that for this stage, action researchers need to think about all aspects of the situation, to critically examine all features of the setting, so they can fashion effective solutions to the problems they confront. I looked at the notes taken on butchers’ paper from the Saturday workshop, which recorded the following discussions:

More knowledge on processes WA Police and Department Child Protection use when getting involved in families. Explain what is child abuse? Children not listening to parents what can we do about it? We have not seen any progress over the years with Police and DCP. Community needs to work as a whole. Different parenting practices need to be acknowledged. What is the difference between discipline and assault? Why
does government not contact community leaders before charging people? What can we do about teenagers? Can we have information about drugs?

These questions posed by the community were further discussed at individual interviews, to reflect and analyse. How could we keep these questions at the forefront of our focus group discussions to try and find positive steps to take? What could the next steps be to alleviate this sense of frustration community members had with the Department? Was there a traditional way of working with families in South Sudan that could be embraced in an Australian context?

One thing the Department should be able to do rather than snatching the child straight away and taking them away from the family they have to call on the community leadership to come and intervene. (Participant 15 Dinka male)

The idea of working with elders is something that, wherever possible, the Mirrabooka office of the Department has taken an active role in pursuing over the years. If certain problems are identified in the community, elders are often consulted to find out more about the area of concern, rather than case workers taking punitive measures. An example might be a case presented to the Department with the concerns being the child presenting with burn marks on his body. On further investigation, it was found that it was a case of cupping, a practice described by Sawriker (2017) as a traditional folk remedy. Further discussions took place between community members and the case workers about how this practice was used as a healing remedy. In that case, it was then understood by case workers that the parents were acting protectively towards their child, as opposed to being abusive. Because of this discussion, and the parents’ express desire to explore alternative remedies, no further action was needed:

And when they have a problem, they ask can you come and help me? Elders are helping a lot of families. We will go and speak to them. Some problems will disappear. That’s what we do in community. So, whoever wants me I’ll come and that’s where the confidentiality really comes in. Whatever you share must be confidential. (Participant 40 Madi female)

Research carried out in the USA by Gustafson and Iluebbey (2013) found that Sudanese families agreed that their top priority was to identify respected elders in their communities to guide and mediate conflicts in families and communities as they settled in their new homeland. In line with traditional Sudanese ways of working, Deng (2006) reports that dealing with any cattle grazing disagreements in Sudan were regulated, and conflicts managed and resolved by traditional leaders, in accordance with intertribal conventions
and customs. This importance placed on elders is consistent with feedback during the focus groups:

Why not make a bond with the South Sudanese community elders? You can have an emergency meeting whenever you need to understand how this community works so we stop misunderstandings. (Participant 12 Bari female)

I thought this might be a positive, proactive first step to take, and asked participants for more advice on this option. If there are issues within a family, then it makes sense to consult with elders. Abuyi (2013, p. 101) also stresses how elders and leaders are central in offering the opportunity to settle conflict within community and family. I find that problems start arising when we have to deal with the sensitivity of the work and the issues around confidentiality:

There is also this thing of the shame factor. This idea that they failed as parents. They are sort of worried about how they look. And also the community, people talk as well, so the fear is real, like it's not unfounded. (Participant 9 Dinka female)

The idea of shame was also raised as a theme across several interviews, with families not wanting elders involved at all. It appeared that any dealings with the Department was often a cause of shame to the family. Sawriker (2017) points out that disharmony, or lack of cohesion within the family, threatens the family’s name and standing. For this reason, family problems are not discussed or, more commonly, are only discussed within the nuclear or close extended family. The sense of shame moves beyond embarrassing the individual family and moves into shame brought on the whole South Sudanese community:

The elders might actually make things worse and most families don’t want their personal things being known anyway. I mean there has been violent cases where a woman gets pressured in the community by the elders to drop the charges, so while they are saying that we are dealing with it in a way that is culturally appropriate, what they are doing behind the scenes often is giving her pressure, you know ‘how dare you shame our community and go to the police. Participant 9 Dinka female)

This participant raises and important point about the hierarchical nature of the community. A study by Milner and Khawaja (2010) suggest that there is an impact of acculturation stress on the marital relationships of Sudanese families, suggesting that the patriarchal system challenges male domination. They found that men still perceived themselves as being in charge of the household, similar to their dominant family position in South Sudan. While it was important to hear from men, I knew it was also important to ensure the gender of participants was balanced to capture the voices and perspectives of women. Goodkind and Deacon (2004) suggest that women’s voices can be overlooked, or go unheard, as the
formal elected leaders in community are often the ones who are consulted, and women might be three times more marginalized than men because of their economic, ethnic and racial status.

The woman is everything. She is the life. Men they go and provide so this talking is especially good for the women I think if that would continue, it would help because you can take a woman out from the home. You know these two are tied together. They listen to each other and then if the women can really understand their children very well. (Participant 40 Bari female)

I found that my initial concerns about participants not sharing information with me as a researcher seemed to abate, as I met more women; the trust seemed to build, and they started linking me with other women they thought were significant in community. One positive comment was:

You should meet our healer, please do try and meet her she is very good. She is very wise for or community. (Participant 38 Kakwa female)

The importance of Church, and coming together regularly as Christians, was also consistent throughout the interviews. Zink (2017) highlights that when Sudanese refugees were separated from their traditions and culture they found a resilience in Christian communities. I knew the history of Christian missionaries moving in to South Sudan over the years, that Christianity had become an important factor in the lives of many. Church was also acknowledged as playing a central role in their lives:

If there is trouble in a family, they will always go to the pastor of a church. (Participant 2 Annuak male)

Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010, p. 25) argue that the coping themes in Sudan included support from family, community and religious faith. That made me curious, because, faced with such awful atrocities, how was it possible to move on? Was it their faith that helped them cope?

We have meetings in our church and that is where we come together, we share together and we refer to the Bible. God’s word is the example. If you are successful in this area, you will be successful in life. You may fall down but you can remain strong and this is an encouragement to women. (Participant 35 Kuku woman)

Healing is the most important it’s the biggest. I think when healing takes place as some people still have that pain. (Participant 40 Bari female)

As the interviews with women increased, I found that the topic of healing seemed to be a powerful message they wanted to convey. Several people spoke about forgiveness and healing as a way of trying to move on in their lives, and something I felt we rarely talked
about in our Western approaches. Are there opportunities to work in a healing space with community?

Many of our people need healing. There are people you go to. People find it hard to talk but it is no big thing. They won’t reveal their private lives to them - I mean a government person but it’s good to talk to someone else. Some people say I am strong I am strong. So much sadness like one lady when they were escaping guns….her sister passed away and we tied the children to the mother. There was nothing else to do. They had to bury her and keep going. Healing is the only way for her sadness. (Participant 33 Pojulu female)

Healing and forgiveness were prominent themes during the interviews with people who were regular church goers, and they seemed to be clear of their ideas in how the community might be better supported. That left also me querying those people who were not members of church. Where did they go for support? What were their coping mechanisms?

I believe in God but they (the community) still think it is a village but it is not. Going to church on a Sunday and being seen as a good person, dressed in your Sunday best, you’re not going to expose your bad things. No one goes to church wanting to look bad, or mad or crazy or whatever, they hide their pain and this is a big problem I see. (Participant 32, Nuer male)

This participant seemed disillusioned, and went on to talk about how he felt quite isolated from community. Another male participant also spoke about the inappropriateness of discussing feelings with others:

I used to go to church but I don’t go to church now. I have a fear of the whispers even though I’m educated I still have that conservatism in me. It doesn’t go. For me it so devastating when everyone knows oh yeah him oh yeah….it would give me mental stress about how to cope. (Interview 11 Dinka male)

I appreciated that people who were not part of church were finding other ways to cope, and I came to understand and respect the levels of extreme resilience that I saw in many participants. Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) investigate how Sudanese families were adapting to their Australian destination, and report that their resilience was supported because of family, community, and religion, as well as an acceptance of their situation and a determination to survive. I asked one of the pastors if she was happy to be contacted by the Department if a family needed support. She was agreeable; so, I asked what her approach might be if the family was not part of the church community; would a request for help still be viable?
He may not come to church but he needs to come to community. Some people could visit him if he allowed it. (Participant 40 Kakwa female)

Again, this, to me emphasised how important a sense of community is, and how South Sudanese people seek comfort in the collective. Tempany (2009) reports Sudanese refugees show higher psychological distress, and use cultural coping mechanisms such as finding comfort in the collective experience of loss. It did seem on many levels that community, as a unit, was a very important part of the identity of families.

5.7 Cycle 2 - Act
To move into the second cycle of action, I was continually reflecting on topics raised in groups and in individual interviews, asking for feedback and suggestions for action:

I really enjoyed the big Saturday workshop it was very informative and the food was really very nice. Three hours is not enough time for all of us to talk about what we need to. We need more time than that. (Participant 31 Madi female)

Although I was keen to get action happening, participants were asking for more time to be heard. It did seem like a logical next step to set up more workshop space since, I found that time was always an issue; at the previous workshop, some people arrived two hours too late to actively take part in the group discussions. I was also becoming more aware of my Western values, because I now realise how much I pride myself on punctuality, on developing a planned approach to my work and on achieving outcomes. I thought that the proposal of a residential camp would allow more fluidity with time and take pressure off the need to clock watch:

I think a good few people would like a camp and are willing to support it. If you choose the representatives we can come together and work out how to handle those people. (Participant 37 Kuku female)

Similarly, to the previous workshop, I approached service providers that I knew well and were interested in following up on the unfinished conversations of the previous workshop.

The Family Service Team at the City of Stirling was particularly supportive, acknowledging the need to move beyond direct confrontations between the Department, WA Police, and community and in to achievable actions. As a bridge, we all agreed that having an external facilitator for this camp might help create room to have meaningful conversations. Tim Muirhead Director of the CSD Network (http://csdnetwork.com.au) was contacted as someone respected by community and agencies alike, with his wide-ranging experience in all aspects of community development. He has gained a reputation as a community
development practitioner, trainer, facilitator and policy adviser of considerable skill and passion, and had already established a good working relationship with the South Sudanese community. Tim planned a comprehensive workshop plan called ‘Focusing of Family Matters’ (Figure 5.7) which was based on different ways of seeing the world.

**How do we help our children thrive in Australia? How can agencies work with us, in doing this?**

![Figure 5.7 Tim Muirhead’s Focusing of Family Matters](image)

We all spent time on the workshop agenda, trying to create a balance of both discussions and actions; but I was still unsure about the level of interest, given some of the frustrations which had emerged during the previous workshop. On the Friday evening I was pleasantly surprised to see a fleet of cars, parents and children all arrive to fill each of the 40 beds. In fact, the camp supervisor had to start turning people away at 10.00 pm, when capacity was reached; but still more and more people kept arriving.

Thinking about White privilege in the literature is one thing, but to be thrown into a situation itself I found was another experience altogether. I was the only white person there, and as I unpacked my bedding in the dormitory, the woman next to me asked if I was sleeping in the separate administrative building. The unequal power I had been studying, and was conscious about, was captured in that one statement. I was worried that the women might
feel uncomfortable with me being there. So I thought I would revisit the question with them later in the night, when I felt the timing was right.

After the meal, the traditional dancing began, and I enjoyed this informal time with laughter and humour, meaning everyone felt more relaxed. Gitterman (2003) examines the use of humour in social work practice, suggesting that humour can put people at ease as they enter unfamiliar situations for the first time. Shared laughter can serve as a social bridge, softening power differentials and social distance. My poor dancing skills were met with hilarity, as I tried to keep up with the Bari tribe drumming rhythms. I found laughter created a real connection with everyone, and this carried on into the night, as we went off to share the dormitory with everyone still laughing together. One Kuku woman took me by the arm as we tried to find our way in the dark, and remarked that she saw me as white on the outside, but said my heart was really African. I am not sure she quite comprehended how much I valued the depth of that compliment.

The next day, Tim began Focusing on Family Matters discussing the challenges and solutions for South Sudanese families living in Western Australia. Alongside were other service providers—Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre working with young people; a Departmental Care Placement Team Leader; and a former parenting facilitator who had experience in working with refugee communities.

It was an intense day, with lots of heated debates; however, I thought having Tim there, with his high level negotiation and facilitation skills, was invaluable. Having someone seen as a neutral skilled facilitator, able to keep the conversations flowing even when there were tensions in the room, was invaluable. He brought people back to focus on the topics, and created spaces for informal chats throughout the tea breaks.

At the end of the day, several actions were identified as key suggestions for change. Parents reported their frustrations over the years with agencies, and expressed their desire to move on in partnership. Teenagers who were there, acknowledged some of the pressures they felt as they tried to balance life as teenagers. Actions were broken into suggestions for agency responses and suggestions for community responses:

Agency responses — training for staff on how to work in collectivist cultures; develop guidelines on how to respond if children complain about their parents; encourage teenagers to connect with their parents and challenge the unconscious stereotypes that may be influencing agency responses. There was a consensus that until South
Sudanese, and/or African people are working in agencies (e.g. social workers, group counsellors, trainers, etc.) the South Sudanese community will never be fully integrated or understood.

Community responses — unite with each other to become supportive, and to learn from each other on how to maintain positive relationships with children, so we don't come to the attention of authorities. Linking children to other adults in the South Sudanese community if there is a family disagreement. Support families in understanding how the systems work, how to raise children well in Australia, and truly be there for our children.

By the end of the day, a whole raft of issues had been highlighted, debates held, conversations and notes were written up with a list of actions.

5.8 Cycle 3 - Look

I found the beginning of cycle 3 to be the hardest stage of my whole research experience. Feelings were running very high, and the parents had put forward a whole series of issues they wanted to work on. I was very aware that community members wanted to see action now:

Well the worst I think about that weekend camp is that nothing really comes from that meeting to be really honest. People have the same problems and we are going round in circles without solution. It is the same old thing and we talk talk talk. (Participant 36 Luo female)

The problem was that my research question was based around the actions of developing a model of community care, and the research participants wanted a whole series of different actions. As well as the key points being raised at that workshop, in other individual interviews people were asking for more input from WA Police, more sessions with my line manager explaining why children are removed, more linkages with elders:

The feedback it (the workshop) was awesome, but in saying that we had a lot of workshops lined up in the past and we have never seen a result. So for us to conclude whether it was a great thing is when we start seeing a result, because of a lot of the time people speak about things, people put up their views, what happened is yeah we’ll look at it, go away and get back to you. This time we are going to work closely with the community but that has never happened. Participant 34 Madi male)

I considered postponing my research for a while, to try and continue working with community members to focus on developing more workshops as part of my Departmental role, rather than as a researcher. The research all seemed too hard to achieve, and I felt
overwhelmed at the high expectations community members now had on moving in to the future. It seemed like every single part of the research planning had not gone as I had planned, or anticipated and I was at a loss on how to move forward:

So, if things happen we as a community come together and try and fix the issue. So, if you are serious about better outcomes then you need to do something serious too.
(Participant 17 Pojulu male)

I had visited Ernie Stringer in Fremantle, who has published several books on action research, and sought advice on how he thought I could work well with community. He suggested that I try to keep conversations in the present, rather than focusing too much on history and politics of Sudan, because it would be easy to quickly become overwhelmed, and I would struggle to achieve anything meaningful. Having a very calming and supportive UWA supervisor was something else I am grateful for, as she suggested I might focus on some small shifts in thinking, and suggested breaking the research into manageable chunks. My literature review was a further issue that bothered me, since rereading it now felt so static and irrelevant. I considered changing it again to include other topics such as loss, trauma and settlement issues. I wondered if I should write a whole new literature review at the end, when I knew where the cycles were going to lead me. I then read Whitehead and McNiff (2011, p. 117) who suggest not writing a literature review when doing action research, but to show how you are reviewing and engaging with the literature throughout the report itself. This seemed to provide more flexibility, and allowed me to be pulled off into areas the participants wanted to focus on.

Stringer (2014, p. 144) talks about a “lightbulb’ or “a-ha” experience that provides researchers with greater clarity about puzzling events or phenomena, describing them as epiphanic moments. Mine came from (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) highlighting Fanon’s apt description of colonisation. He summarises it as something that brought complete disorder to colonised peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It seemed quite appropriate to me that the research itself with colonised participants had fallen into this sense of disorder and chaos, rather than the planned and structured approach I might have had with using a positivist methodology. I reflected on how my whole experience of carrying out research appeared like the description McNiff and Whitehead (2011) gives when he suggests that the process of action research can frequently be untidy, haphazard and experimental. They stress that, to succeed in your vision as an action researcher, you need to exercise your tenacity and imagination to find
ways of doing so. These insights made me revisit my notes, listen to the interviews again, and reread the community feedback. This gave me a whole new starting point I started finding opportunities to move forward, rather than obstacles to pull me backwards.

5.9 Cycle 3 - Think

So, we as a community have a collective responsibility to look after these children. (Participant 17 Pojulu male)

In hindsight, I couldn’t get to these meaningful conversations without the initial deep listening of the story telling, slowing down the process, being involved in the heated debates, learning about community dynamics and the multiple issues faced by South Sudanese families. Townsend (2013) argues that action research is based on iterative, successive phases, each building on the last. The result of these features is that by design action research changes and develops over time, and does so in unpredictable ways. Action researchers must be willing to work in this complex and uncertain area which provides the greatest potential for achieving significant change. Despite the whole range of issues and concerns throughout interviews, participants repeatedly expressed the desire to keep South Sudanese children in the South Sudanese community:

I think the foster care is a great idea. So, for the kids to be taken care of people they know or from the same cultural background I think that will really help. (Participant 34 Madi male)

To me, these statements cut to the heart of the matter, and the point I was hoping to get to in my research. They brought me full circle in the cyclical process of revisiting the research question and the reasons why children should be placed with community. The provision of culturally appropriate placements is crucial for ethnic minority children in out of home care, for the preservation of their cultural identity and protection of cultural safety Sawrikar (2017, p. 167). Again, culture was highlighted, and concerns around the potential loss of the South Sudanese culture was raised by many participants who were feeling that children might struggle in society when they lose their sense of identity:

The thing is if they are taken completely they have to learn the culture as well. If they go out of the culture, then this will be an issue later when they come back regardless if they come back positive or not Yeah they wont fit in to the society and again that will be very hard to manage. (Interview 3 Dinka male)

In almost all interviews, the importance of culture, and the retention of culture, was the overriding theme of why children should be kept in community:
Our culture is not going to get lost, my children are not going to get lost. They will learn the same things. If care is from the South Sudanese or the Africans, that will really help them and be good for them because I think other cultures are unknown. (Participant 40 Madi female)

I was also very aware of tensions which were raised at previous workshops, and while I was very keen to move forward on the idea of community care, I was also very aware not to minimise the concerns that parents had put forward:

There is a reality here so let’s pause from what is going on in South Sudan for a moment. Yes, there are issues at home but there are also a lot of issues here that need to be addressed. There needs to be some sort of compromise between communities and the Department for the welfare of the children. Because if there isn’t, the Department is just going to fall back on how they do things because that is the only tool they’ve got. This is a chance to have input and if you don’t then don’t complain when the Department defaults to how they normally do things. (Participant 9 Dinka female)

Although this seemed like a bold statement to make, I also think that this participant makes a valid point; that we need to find ways of compromising between a Western child protection system and a collectivist community, to try and find some middle ground to work from. Could we use that statement as a starting point for the next cycle?

When you take them away and keep them from their South Sudanese culture you are denying them their rights. The policies need to be reviewed so you people stop with this bad reputation. This is not only in Western Australia but all over Australia the migrant families are coming more and more. You have to start changing your policies. (Participant 15 Dinka male)

5.10 Cycle 3 - Act

The final cycle of action as part of the research process was to set up a specific workshop that was based on the initial research question of community care. While it was clear that there was a broad spectrum of requests from workshops on parenting, such as understanding systems and liaising with elders, there were still people keen to develop community care:

You need to work with the community as a partner to develop a model. You know I mean to empower them, give them responsibility and we form something like a Community of Family or Group Care Model you know, and then we sort of, if anything happens within this Sudanese community the children need to be taken care of, and then these people will work, they will be resourced to do that. It may be a difficult thing, there could be barriers and legal requirements. I have so many women last Sunday I was talking to some of them, and these are the women who raised us, they can care for children regardless of what. So, we just need to support them, to give them a bit of training. We need to do a few things and we can be ready to go. (Participant 17 Pojulu male)
It seemed that there was an appetite to move forward. So, while there could be further educational workshops, some participants could still explore community care.

Community members decided that Tuesday evenings would work best to set up an initial time for a community care conversation. I invited the Departmental Placement Care Team Leader along to participate and talk about the role of caring for children. I found myself having another moment of anxiety, as I waited to see if any community members were going to turn up (Appendix 5.10). But I was again pleasantly surprised, when reception staff called to say that a whole group of South Sudanese parents were in the waiting room. In fact, 36 people turned up, all asking for information and saying they wanted to sign up to become carers should a South Sudanese child be looking for a placement.

If going in to Cycle 3 was my low point in the research journey, leaving the same cycle 3 had, instead, led to my high point. It seemed that the action research process had worked, and I reflected on Stringer’s (2014) description of action research, highlighting how we can systemically investigate and design more effective solutions to the complex array of issues at work in any social setting. It seemed that this was the first time we were all engaging in real dialogue, as opposed to those heated debates and stand offs:

When they announce people to come in the church to come to the child protection workshop. There was the time when I pick interest and I said oh I think this is good because all along I wanted to hear this. (Participant 30 Kuku female)

As the session developed, I started scribbling key points people wanted to raise on a whiteboard:

*Room allocation if Australian families have small rooms - In the African culture when there is someone come to the family, the person is a visitor and we give the bedroom to the visitor and your own children they sleep in the same room.*

*We would like training. Which rules to follow so when the child does something wrong what we should do?*

*What is the rule if you are renting and there is that extra person coming? Does the landlord let you?*

*This is good to come for the first time and because we are available to take care but we still need to go back and have sitting with the household to ask how they see this. How will a new child be with our family?*
Could you do training for us so we know what rules we should follow?’

If the younger kids at home at the same age & they are smacking each other. Will the person looking after them be in trouble?

If I have a problem with my child and the child calls the police is it compulsory my child is taken in to care?

What happens if we look after a child and there is trouble and the mum tries to come and take the child back?

What are the problems you have with foster kids that we should know about?

These queries highlighted that people had thought through some of the situations children and families might face. I must admit that I got quite excited about this, since it tied with everything I was hoping to explore.

If you are serious you need to know community development. It is about making the community own their own solutions, they come up with their own solutions, they do their own things. You as the Department can facilitate the process. So, if we do that, the same model can translate to the Somalian community, we can translate it to whatever community, even the Aboriginal if the model works but we need to do the groundwork. If we don’t reach that stage we are just wasting time and wasting money and we end up with more people failing, going to jail and so it spirals. It is important that we really step back and start thinking. (Participant 17, Pojulu male)

This statement sums up how I think we could move forward to develop not only a community care model, but also a new meaningful partnership with members of the South Sudanese community. I will now carry on with the cyclic nature of action research using look, think, act, and moving into several findings from each cycle of reflections and learning leading into the insights outlined in Chapter 7.
Chapter 6 - Reflections

6.1.1 Reflections and learnings from Cycle 1

My starting point for reflecting on what I learned in Cycle 1 takes me back to the initial statement by Whitehead (2006, p. 25), describing how we can experience ourselves as living contradictions when our values are denied in our practice. I found that being an insider researcher was probably the most problematic experience for me as a researcher. At the outset, I knew that I was going to face challenges being a worker within a child protection system and a researcher at the same time, but I didn’t realise how hard it would become not to blur both roles. I had to continually check in with my university supervisor, as I would get enthused about a forthcoming community workshop or meeting, and she would help me understand my role as a researcher, as opposed to my work role.

Equally, when I had supervision at my workplace, and started discussing some of the impressions South Sudanese community members were telling me about the Department, my line manager would ask me if this was part of my research findings. This blurring was hard to differentiate, because I found myself constantly moving between both roles. One description I was particularly drawn to, which helped me conceptualise this dynamic, is Kemmis’ (2009, p. 464):

> Action research aims to change three things: practitioners’ practices, their understandings of their practices and the conditions in which they practise. Each shapes the others in an endless dance in which each asserts itself attempting to take the lead, and each reacts to the other.

He explains that action research can be the music for this dance, animating and urging change in practice. Thinking about how I’ve had to change tempo, understand the power of silence, change tempo or become vocal, is a powerful way to imagine theory and practice not as separate entities, but with intertwined meaning.

I am very aware of Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 178) highlighting how researchers working across cultures are in receipt of privileged information. After being welcomed so openly by the South Sudanese community, and gaining such personal insights into people’s lives, does leave me with several responsibilities as a researcher. Smith goes on to argue that
researchers have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). To try and ensure I didn’t fall into that scenario, I presented my research findings back to community members and agencies before moving to the final write up, to capture the essence of their stories and verifying it: Did I get this right? Or did I get this wrong? Overall, the responses have been positive, and I sensed a consensus from people that they felt they were being heard. I would also suggest that there are now expectations that there needs to be several follow-up actions, since my action research has raised expectations in community.

This leads me into what I would consider to be the main recommendations arising from part of Cycle 1, which are based on the importance participants placed on culture and the implications this has on practice.

6.1.2 Recommendations - Culture, advocacy research design

Culture

Goodkind and Deacon (2004) states that culture is important for families to make sense of the lives of South Sudanese communities, while Qin et al. (2015) stresses that having a strong root in their native culture helped families make good decisions. The area of culture is complex, holding multiple meanings with Sawriker (2017, p. 18), acknowledging culture is a difficult word to define, and suggesting that, at the fundamental level, it can refer to any time-honoured tradition passed from one generation to the next that is normal, acceptable and/or of value.

I found the importance placed on culture by participants was mentioned by most participants:

Alright for us if I have a number from 0 - 10 on the importance of culture there needs to be a number above 10 and I would put it at that number because for us culture is the first thing. (Interview 39 Dinka male)

To try and understand the statements about culture I revisited the theme of respect explored by Losoncz (2013), who highlights the significant role in regulatory discourse that culture plays. She argues that we can create struggles and divisions by not acknowledging South Sudanese culture; so, we must try and understand these unique customs if we want
to create signs of respect. In a similar fashion, I found the interviews wove the themes of respect and culture together, with feelings of disempowerment appearing when they, as parents, felt as if their culture was being undermined or threatened:

What is important in those tribes is like to teach their children language and culture. Secondly the parent thinks the child needs to respect their parents to respect their culture and listen to their parents. (Participant 2 Annuak male)

I found culture was something that could not be separated from the family, and indeed, a threat to the family’s culture was perceived as an attack on the family itself. The implications for social workers go further, with Hendrick and Young (2017) suggesting that culture is not a static reality, and people have the right to define themselves without white intervention.

Sawriker (2017, p. 58) explores the area of identity, referring to it as core to the human experience; therefore, preservation of identity has been a core issue for ethnic minorities, because it is threatened to be lost to the majority as soon migration occurs. As families are relocating in the new Australian culture, they are trying to hold on to their sense of belonging and traditions from South Sudan. I would argue that anyone wishing to work alongside South Sudanese communities must locate culture at the centre of practice, and consider how dynamic and ever changing culture impacts individuals, families or communities.

Advocacy

This increasing critical awareness has now left me wondering how to move forward. One possible initiative is to partner with the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre to help develop a new advocacy group made up of key settlement providers and refugee support agencies. I think this group would enable us to have a stronger advocacy voice in the sector and allow us to discuss matters from a service provision perspective. The paper published by Kabranian-Melkonian (2015) on ethical concerns with refugee research suggests that there is the potential to speak for the voiceless, and have their stories told, further arguing that research allows direct interaction with the most vulnerable. The same author suggests that there is also the potential for human services professionals to become the true voice of refugees who have lost their own voices, by becoming the bridge between decision makers and the victims. There is, of course, the danger that agencies become re-
empowered, and privilege their own voices in this process. However, I think that we currently have a unique opportunity to come together, and explore these concepts in more detail; so, perhaps one suggestion may be carrying out participatory research with both refugee groups and agencies themselves to ensure the correct starting point.

Research design
Starting a new advocacy group might be a starting point to think strategically on how research is being developed with vulnerable families. Goodman (2004) suggests that the increasing diversity of the Australian population means more consideration is needed to design research which is truly inclusive of the culture and plurality present within our communities. This is another topic which I intend to raise at the advocacy group by circulating the article by Hugman et al (2011), “When ‘Do No Harm’ Is Not Enough: The Ethics of Research with Refugees and other Vulnerable Groups”, as another topic to consider. This might enable debates between practitioners, as we consider some of the subtleties in our work. Pittaway et al. (2010) highlight how researchers in position of power over participants raises complex ethical questions. They argue that there needs to be a move towards the development of advocacy-focused research that is grounded in human rights and community participation. In an area like Mirrabooka, with high levels of vulnerable groups, and alongside the constant requests for consultations by service providers, I think we have a duty to those families to seek better ways of responding more effectively to such requests.

I would suggest that regardless of whether we are researchers or practitioners, it is worth considering the actions listed for Cycle 1 as foundations to consider our approach when researching or working with marginalised communities.

6.2.1 Reflections and learnings from Cycle 2
Actions around vulnerability, research, education and advocacy led into Cycle 2, and I started getting an idea of the scale of what I might have started with my research. This was a period when I started to sense the messiness of the action research methodology and a move away from the clear linear cycles I thought might emerge. Instead, I had to reflect and re-plan what I thought was going to be achieved at the end of this process, realising it might be something entirely different. Townsend (2013) argues that if action researchers have a willingness to work in complex and uncertain areas, this can provide the greatest potential for achieving significant change. With this in mind, I reflect on topics which arose,
and which I had not considered when first embarking on this research. One of those themes was the importance that participants placed on healing. Given my awareness that the refugee experience creates high levels of trauma after the effects of war and displacement, I have always maintained links to specialist counselling services, such as the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS), who have extensive experience working in this field.

When I heard first-hand the stories people related and some of the tragic circumstances they faced, the topic of healing was one they raised, and how, as a community they dealt with it:

Our church helps us and our counselling to each other. It is where we can have healing together, we read the Bible, we talk and we calm ourselves down. It is very important for us to heal. You should meet our healer. Her husband he also heals and goes into places for the old people because it is important they have holy communion. He even goes into prisons. (Participant 38 Kakwa Female)

This offer to meet with healers was a powerful point in my research and listening to this story made me think about changing my approach when considering future workshops. I’ve witnessed first-hand community members becoming upset and frustrated when they were trying to voice their concerns, and left feeling that they were unheard. Equally I’ve also witnessed government departments and agencies holding defensive stances because they must adhere to certain job remits, legislation or departmental policies. I wonder if the tone of conversations might be set in an entirely different way if we began talking about healing? I asked some participants what they thought about that idea, and they suggested that I talk to people in community that they might nominate as healers, and discuss practicalities. Perhaps, if we were to start proceedings led by the healer in community, and acknowledge the need or desire for healing and forgiveness, we might have a different type of talk with each other.

There may be ways of merging faith, forgiveness, and healing, with therapeutic responses to deal with previous issues of trauma, and indeed, the impact of the current volatile situation in South Sudan:

And how can we move on from this? According to the Sudan Tribune last month Dinka tribe went into Acholi area and killed 150 people in our village back home. It has to be forgiveness. Like here in Australia why do we not talk about forgiveness when people talk
about Aboriginals? I don’t understand it. We cannot carry this hate and anger in our hearts.  
(Participant 4, male Acholi)

This was another powerful statement that I heard, that made me stop and reflect how sometimes as practitioners, we are so busy being busy that we can forget to stop and consider the bigger context families face. Townsend (2013) suggests that action research can throw up surprises, expose contradictions and provide a more complex, sophisticated appreciation of the situation and this was the case as I moved into a deeper understanding of the community members.

In Cycle 2, I also discovered more evidence in line with my own thoughts that there are, in fact, many more South Sudanese families living in Perth than is captured in statistical data. My initial statistics of the number of South Sudanese families living in WA was taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2011 Census showing that 3,266 people from Sudanese background were residing in WA. Over the years, people have often told me that these facts are incorrect, because people are not picked up on the census:

We had prayers back in 2012 and all the Dinka churches combined together and in their attendance book were people who signed in and came on the eve of Christmas. They were 2,500 plus and they were just a small group of Dinka groups Anglicans themselves, let alone the other Dinka groups who go to Catholic Churches and other independent churches. So, that is the proof for us already this number we know. You go the church here and they have over 500 people in that church alone then go to the one on Mirrabooka avenue and you will have 300 plus. They are only 2 churches close by and only a small group of Dinka. You start going to the big one in Malaga the one in Rockingham and in Willeton and there are others so many others. I think the numbers of South Sudanese living in WA are more like 7,000 to 10,000. We are starting our own census because a lot of people have not been counted in the census. All the different ethnic leaders they know how many people they have and we will find the real census. (South Sudanese President WA)

If these statistics are true, then it does have policy and resourcing implications on several levels, including how agencies need to consider being more responsive to community need. I then asked people in community why the census results might be so different, and they told me that community members might not identify as South Sudanese; rather, they state Kenya, or Uganda, where the refugee camps are based, and where they spent so much time or had children. They said that there is also a mistrust of government and suspicion about why they are asked to be on the census at all, so they avoid being picked up on the data. This will be interesting to verify, as we get the results of the community-led
census, and compare the statistics acquired from the community versus the numbers stated in the latest Australian census results.

6.2.2 Recommendations from Cycle 2 - Time, population size, values and using a Community Development Approach

I suggest that a key action arising from Cycle 2 should be setting more time aside to reflect on our own values in our research or work practice. It seems that we have so many time restraints put upon us, that it can be hard to spend time fostering a deeper level of listening and understanding.

Time
I would argue that if we are serious about working both ethically and effectively with South Sudanese communities, then there needs to be more resourcing around the allocation of time. As stated previously, building relationships is a slow process, working towards establishing positions of mutual respect and trust. These conversations are often lengthy, and involve interpreters. Therefore, an extra time allocation must be built in to any research process. I found that my interviews and focus groups often ran three times longer than those of some of my academic peers, as participants used descriptive narratives to tell their stories. Often, as practitioners, we work within tight time restraints, with expectations on achieving timely outcomes; but I have found that most of my effective community engagement has happened out of office hours, at weekends or evenings, when there are fewer time restraints. This may have funding implications, if employers are not resourced to free staff outside core working hours.

Equally, we must be mindful of the time demands we place on community leaders themselves and be aware that they often work tirelessly for long hours for the benefit of their community:

I am passing the leadership across now. I have done so much for community and I am getting tired now. It is time for a new leader to take over and carry on with the work. (Participant 25, Azande)

Losoncz (2013) notes in her research that some leaders find their work demanding and exhausting, placing pressure on career development and family relationships. She also
highlights the willingness of the South Sudanese community to come together, and act on the needs of their community, as a strong positive characteristic of the diaspora. I would agree with her suggesting that this is a unique strength of the community, but I also think that we have a duty to balance these requests and not overburden community leaders.

Size of the South Sudanese population
When considering which of these community members to engage with, I revisit my initial data capturing the number of South Sudanese families taken from the ABS Census, but contested by the community leaders, as previously described. If there are many more families in WA than service providers are aware of, then this does have implications which affect local councils’ ability to respond effectively to the demographics of their residents. What measures are departments and service providers taking to ensure their data records are accurate?

Values
I was keen to incorporate my values of social justice and equity throughout my research. But now I reflect on how important it is to also incorporate the values of the participants themselves. Forgiveness and healing were key topics raised by community; so how can we consider incorporating these into any future research? The subject of healing is a very powerful concept to consider, but it needs to be sensitively managed within the community’s context of forgiveness. How can we support this without meddling in business that is not our own? I wonder if we can ask community for permission to be part of that process and be guided by them on how we might move into more meaningful dialogue. I’d also like to explore more with our Departmental psychologists how this approach sits with Western models of therapy. Savic, et al (2016) notes that many resettling Sudanese refugees found that it was more helpful not to dwell on problems, but get on with life, as opposed to what Western psychotherapeutic approaches may recommend.

Community development
Finally, I focus on community development in this cycle, and reflect on how I have always been drawn to this approach as a way of establishing meaningful partnerships to drive action. Community members in their responses verified that this is indeed an important and powerful way of working in partnership:

You need to work with the community as a partner to develop a model.
This statement typifies how important it is to work towards building trust in community, to be able to move towards a positive partnership approach. Mertens et al. (2009) stresses that researcher relationships with community members may not be characterised by full trust on either side. She suggests that the researcher should consider developing strategies to engage in a trusting transformative partnership. Again, it seems imperative to always move at the pace set by community, letting them identify barriers or ways forward, as opposed to moving quickly to solutions. This process of action research has highlighted for me how tempted I often am as a practitioner to move straight to developing solutions and outcomes, even when I think I am using a community developmental process.

6.3.1 Reflection and learnings from Cycle 3

The final Cycle 3 is a synthesis of the two previous cycles, and although it is the last Cycle as part of my action research, I found it was a period of complete chaos, with a several highs and lows. There seemed to be so much data being generated in interviews, focus groups and workshops, so even trying to bring the research to a natural conclusion was a difficult task. Despite the difficulties, I also saw how this methodology gives the opportunity to be able to stop, change direction and be creative, which I had to do regularly, given the differing requests from the community. I found some people were becoming very frustrated, feeling as if we were going over points covered in previous workshops:

Really I went on Saturday and all I see is talk talk talk. We have been talking for a long time. (Participant 36 Luo female)

Other people felt as if they had been previously left out of the process, and simply being able to express their views was something they were keen to do:

This is good when community comes together to talk. The more we all talk the more you see the anger will not be on fire. It will come down and they will understand.

(Participant 12 Female Bari)

This long process, with many hours spent talking, was a good way to learn more about complexities in community and hear about issues that I had never considered. I reflect now that the one topic I found the hardest to conceptualise and understand from all topics was tribalism. Mainstream service providers can acknowledge the differences
between Sudan and South Sudan and cater for those differences. I now realise that the South Sudanese communities are often grouped together as a homogeneous group, however, in fact, they can have as many differences as similarities:

Here in Australia I am Dinka but we have 10 states with different versions of Dinka all with slightly different cultural traditions. (Participant 3 Dinka male)

As the interviews progressed I started noticing patterns, as people alluded to their tribal allegiances rather than identifying as being South Sudanese. I was curious, knowing of the elections in 2011 which recognised South Sudan as a new country in its own right. I thought that since the vote of independence there might be more of a sense of national pride, rather than still talking about their regional area allegiances. It seemed people didn’t want to expose tensions or to talk openly about conflicts in community; but it became obvious that this was a major hindrance to them coming together as a community. I am not sure if it was because I was an outsider, and they didn’t want to expose any internal conflicts, but I found a few people that offered insights when I asked more about the situation:

Some people they not even attending Sudanese community because what has happened back home, people there still you know fighting each other, they don’t want to meet together sometimes because what has been happening in Sudan. (Participant 36 Annuak Female)

It became apparent that there wasn’t tension between one tribe against another, but instead a whole web of allegiances and complexities, with some very sophisticated lines of tribal alliances. Losoncz (2013) highlights how deep-rooted ethnicities and tribalism exist in South Sudan, suggesting that resolving these issues are a serious stumbling block in the stability of this new nation. I was curious about the tribes; wanting to learn the stories behind tribalism to find out if the tensions at home were mirrored here in Australia; but I also wanted to deal with the topic sensitively, without provoking tension:

Some people are much more tribal in their thinking and there is a sort of ethnic division. Some people are strong on that and some people aren't really. For me I am South Sudanese, that is the important thing it is not the fact I am Dinka but other people are very fixed in their tribal identities with what is going on back home. The clashes and conflict has impact on communities here as well. (Participant 9 Dinka female)

It could be argued, with this interview, that this Dinka participant feels she can make this statement, because of her privilege of being part of the dominant majority from a South
Sudanese perspective. It is interesting that other participants disagreed with this view, so I wanted to try and understand how the divisions started. I revisited the historical accounts of Sudan, and was interested in the work of Zambakari (2015), who locates the conflict within a wider history of state formation, including legacies of enslavement in the pre-colonial and colonial period. He refers to the days of colonisation, when Sudan had a system of governance administered by Great Britain. He argues that this combined a highly centralised system with a decentralised local administration, resulting in the politicising of race and ethnicities. He also suggests that because of this, each government in Sudan has adopted a similar model of governance, arguing that the population was divided based on race, ethnicity or religion. Based on this, I then asked participants what they thought had happened in their country under British colonisation and how this affected their tribes today:

So, when the British came and colonised us they said we were the only group in the whole of South Sudan who were manageable because we were well organised and we had our Chiefs and rules and order yes well organised so it was very easy for the British to manage these people. The Kingdom was fighting the British but they took it by force because they had firearms and took over the Kingdom. They took the King and shot him. They divided our people into 3 countries to Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Congo but these are the same people. The same people, the same culture but they were scattered. (Participant 25 Azande male)

This statement illustrates where some divisions were created, and indeed, there was a lot of sadness during interviews, as participants referred back to the days where their parents or grandparents were free to roam throughout the country and spoke how the war had changed this for them:

We were like farmers, we looked after crops, we grew animals and ate vegetables these kind of things. Some of the other tribes they used to move from place to place looking for pasture. Everybody had a place. (Participant19 Kakwa female)

Bassil (2010) writes about the underlying causes of conflict, suggesting how scholars blame the role of race and ethnicity in creating divisions as the underlying causes; but he states that these differences, or divisions, are not causes of conflict, rather, they are symptoms. Although there are lots of community dynamics, I think it is imperative to spend time understanding the complexities and tensions, or we may unknowingly add more stress to a very sensitive topic:

People are scared of what Dinkas are doing to the other tribes back home. I don’t have a problem here. We are all sailing in the same boat, the same market, the same medical centre so what is the problem? I teach them to do the right thing. God has given us a new country so what are we fighting for? (Participant 31 Madi male)
6.3.2 Findings and recommendations from Cycle 3 – Community dynamics and developing a community care model

The actions from Cycle 3 focus mainly on how to move forward are based on these current community dynamics. I think it is important to be aware that community members might come from a similar geographical area, and might have experienced similar traumatic experiences as they resettle in Australia, but they might also identify themselves by different tribal allegiances. The current tensions between tribal groups fighting in South Sudan is preventing some people coming together and I would argue that there is potential danger to feed the tensions if we overlook or minimise the situation:

But I’m not comfortable, I’m not comfortable, even there is a meeting, I’m not going because I’m, they are the ones slaughtering us back home, especially even myself, I have lost my immediate family being slaughtered at the shelter. In Facebook they are saying bad things about us like they’re the ones now ruling South Sudan, they going to kill and they’re going to finish us so that there will be no tribes of ours left. (Participant 38 Female Kakwa)

I would suggest that it is imperative that we try and understand some of the divisions and allegiances between groups, when realising how tense the situation is, to make informed decisions about bringing people together:

I want go and visit my people back in Sudan but now I am here I behave completely different from them even though I don’t realise. For no reason, they will know I am there and they will send people to kill me for no reason. And they just like to slaughter, dead bodies, no head you don’t know where the head is taken. You wouldn’t know why I didn’t come back to Australia if I was taken away in the night. (Participant 30 Kakwa female)

These heightened tensions mean that there is a danger to make assumptions or recommendations about a topic which is so volatile in its nature. It is imperative that, as outsiders to the situation, we must try and educate ourselves on the current political situation as well as possible. Similarly, Sawrikar and Katz (2014) suggest that case workers should be aware of regional conflicts, and suggest that CaLD families may prefer a non-ethically matched caseworker, in this manner avoiding areas where there are regional conflicts. They also say that these tensions should be considered as a factor when placing
children in out of home care. The situation back home remains serious and has a direct impact, as people in Australia have many family members still in war zones.

As we move into the future, it is becoming apparent that there are going to be more challenges facing the wider South Sudanese community. Recent news coming out of Melbourne has the press reporting on several assaults and criminal acts described as being committed by dangerous gangs of South Sudanese young people. This has been raised as a community concern in WA and was picked up in the interviews:

Some children are doing good here but some are doing really bad. Some are becoming alcohol addicted, like as you see now in Melbourne, the children are not doing well. They are drinking and stealing stuff smoking, drinking, smoking drugs. These things are really, really very bad, very tough on the parents. We need to find out more about all these things. Children and parents together.
(Participant 36 Lou female)

Since these incidents were reported, there has recently been a flurry of movement from service providers, as they realise the need to be more fully engaged with the community to work more effectively. I would suggest, however, that the way forward is not to have endless rounds of community consultations, but rather try to keep building the bridges between the South Sudanese communities, the government, and service providers. This forms the basis of the current stage of my study, as we move into Cycle 4 and the resulting actions.

This research has explored some of the barriers and complexities, previously unknown, about community dynamics and tribalism, which I think must be a consideration when developing any community initiative. These dynamics are fluid and can change dramatically, depending on the volatility of the situation in the home country. It became apparent to me, when talking to participants, that there were several challenges for them, both individually and collectively, as they struggled with their identity. Zambakari (2015) suggests that South Sudan’s diversity requires a new concept of citizenship that is inclusive of the different nationalities. He warns that without reforming layers of colonial governance, with inclusive citizenship, South Sudan will continue to face uprising and conflict that quickly take an ethnic dimension. This is consistently reported during many of the interviews:

Some individuals take it upon themselves to propaganda but it is something happening far away. We got like the church where all the groups all come together. We pray in the
same church so things can be minimised and addressed. We are still one people.
(Participant 17 Pojulu male)

We need to find ways of supporting community members like this participant, as well as
recognising the tough challenges facing the currently elected WA South Sudanese
President, as he strives to embrace the values of harmony and to unite people both in
South Sudan and in Western Australia.

**Developing a community care model**

While we acknowledge that it would be impossible to develop 64 models of community
care reflecting the number of existing tribes, I think that there are other opportunities to
explore natural groupings. There was clearly a lot of passion and a lot of deep wounds
about the tribal divides. So, I asked participants if these tensions needed to be considered
if children in out of home care were placed in care:

> You could make it so worse, especially if you put an Equatorian child to a Dinka family
or Nuer family. It is just not something that Equatorian would not accept. A Dinka might
accept, but Equatorian will say no. And also within the Equatorian, if that child is also
Equatorian you have to know those tribes they for you, you ask them from Equatoria which
community do you come from, or which tribe are you from? (Participant 19 Kuku
female)

More work needs to be done to explore, to try and understand community dynamics and
the complexities that exist when matching a child to an appropriate placement. Ongoing
partnerships with key people in community to maintain links are key. There are also current
opportunities in community which could be explored. Some community members are
already running childcare services from their homes, known as Family Day Carers, and as
the following participant highlights, this is another option to consider:

> I was thinking about the model of where like you have got the childcare model where you
have Family Day Carers, you already have carers, we could do something like that and
even on weekends for instance, if the children need to be taken care of on weekends we
can get people who can do that, respite sort of work and things like that, so it is easy.
(Participant 17 Pojulu male)

There may be an existing group like Family Day Carers who could easily slot into the role
of carer if a child needs to be placed in out of home care. This is another option to explore
in partnership with community members.
6.4 Moving into Cycle 4

Townsend (2013) suggests that the decision about when to stop action research is not just a decision about concluding it entirely, but also about when. For the purposes of my academic requirements, I am concluding the cycles as I move into Cycle 4.

One exciting new initiative has been the development of new workshops funded by the City of Stirling and Parenting Connect WA (See Fig 6.4.). This new workshop is based on a model of community development aimed at exploring new ways of supporting parents as they raise their children. This directly responds to recommendations by Losoncz (2016), who suggests that parents should be given opportunities and safe spaces to explore the dilemmas of adjusting to new parental values and norms. She further suggests that parents need to find ways of implementing these norms which are meaningful and acceptable to them.

We were privileged to secure a top parenting workshop facilitator funded by Parent Connect WA, Rebecca Forte. Rebecca has a background in community development, but is also trained in many contemporary models of parenting. She co-facilitated the group alongside two South Sudanese women leaders, who were funded by the City of Stirling. The idea was to explore the concepts of Western parenting models and unpack what thoughts and understandings participants have about them. The South Sudanese President WA welcomed this approach, and suggested the inclusion of a grandparent in the delivery of sessions to further explore intergenerational differences. Given Baird et al. (2015) finding that it is expected for young Sudanese women to go to elder women in their community with their problems, this seemed a good fit.

These Saturday workshops offered a chance for parents to talk about their own personal experiences, and then to hear reasons why Western models of parenting place importance on theories such as attachment. The starting point was for participants to bring their own stories to the group, talking about their lives, and about their families’ stories. This was a slow process, but I found over 6 weeks’ fascinating and rewarding discussions that took place. There were leanings towards an appreciation of the model known as Circle of Security (Hoffman, 2013) based on strategies which allow parents to be more attuned and responsive to their children underpinned by attachment theory. Practical workshops explore the needs of children to have room to explore from a secure base and haven.
A particular difference in these discussions was the possibility of the child returning to the hands of the collective, rather than the secure base of a nuclear family of mum and dad. This may sound like a simple modification of an established model, but I would argue that the process involved to reach these levels of discussion has been just as important as developing a new model itself. It has opened different types of conversations, moving away from the rights and wrongs of individualistic versus a collective culture, and instead using the analogy of safe hands in a supportive circle to care for children.

This process has also enabled a meaningful discussion about asking what happens when a set of supportive hands in the collective is missing for whatever reason. It is a less confronting way of suggesting that if no safe hands are there for the child, then, on occasions, the government intervenes. This may be one of the first times that I have been in a group situation and a community member agrees that there are times when it might be important to involve government if a hand is missing to support that child. The facilitator, and myself, are keen to build on these conversations, so that we might find mutual ways of supporting children in the community from both a community and agency perspective. We are keen to move towards developing something which responds to the challenge of parenting in a new culture, but that has been created and owned by members of the community themselves. If we can learn more about how this process has been participatory in nature and developed by community, then perhaps a similar model could be applied to other cultural groups.
Chapter 7

7.1 Insights

As I highlighted throughout the cycles and chapters, there is potentially further future work required to analyse a whole range of topics which have been raised throughout this research but I had to try and bring my study to a conclusion. As McNiff and Whitehead (2011) suggest, this is the point in an action research dissertation where the researcher sets out what they believe they have found. I was very keen to carry on with the cyclical narrative, since I have found this to be a powerful way of capturing the voice of the participants, and it also allowed me to stop and consider my reflections along the way.

I found the work of Hones (1998) particularly resonating, as he outlines the transformational power of the narrative enquirer. He suggests that researchers who wish to add authenticity to their work and broaden its scope, should consider alternatives to the dry prose of many social science texts that squeeze the life out of words. I have found it hard to try and capture the spirit of the participants. So, having as many direct quotes from the interviews has been my attempt to honour some of their unique stories. Future research should build on these experiences and explore the use of images and multimedia to enable participants to tell their stories in the first person and in their own words.

Through my review of the literature I have been impressed how the concept of critical consciousness, based on the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, has influenced the thoughts of researchers and practitioners working with oppressed and marginalised communities. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states that critical consciousness “promotes the idea that if oppressed and oppressor groups can learn to critically identify the dehumanising social conditions that marginalise some and privilege others, the plight of the oppressed will then be understood as socially constructed rather than immutable” (p. 5). Critical consciousness is the approach I have taken in my research, as I worked with elders of the South Sudanese community, with individual members of the community and with community groups.

Indeed, the concept of critical consciousness was a major underlying component of the Transformative Learning Model I have used as a basis for my research with the South Sudanese community. I used this last model to promote critical reflection and dialogue with
groups and individuals, to understand the basis of their fears and their mistrust of the Department. Through dialogue involving feelings and emotions in the reflective process, community members who participated in the research, and those who benefitted from regular discussions as part of the 4 Cycles of the research, have now an increased awareness of Departmental policies and Australian Laws. As a researcher, and also as a practitioner working in the Department, it gave me a greater awareness of their background and the psycho/social experiences and as well as the subordination that harm families and children from traditionally marginalised groups, as they seek a new life and a new beginning in a new country, far removed from their traditional land, family structures and culture.

This research has highlighted how action research as a methodology can deepen the understanding of the researcher through the knowledge created by participants in meaningful dialogue. This correlates with McNiff and Whitehead (2011), who stress how important it is for action researchers to be involved in processes of social transformation, and trying to find ways of living their understandings in practice, which begins with developing capacity in critical self-reflection.

7.2 How can the Department for Child Protection and Family Support develop a South Sudanese Community Carers' model?

This research began with a belief held by myself, the South Sudanese Community members and the Department, that placing children in community-based culturally appropriate placements, should children enter state care, was an important step to make. The response from this participant early on in the process made me think I was on the right track:

    It is better to keep our children together. They will keep our language and our ways. This is very important to us. (Participant 7, Luo male)

Initially, I wanted to move into community action because of all the frustrations outlined previously, to develop something meaningful and supportive of families, rather than further alienating and marginalising them.

The context, however, encompasses South Sudanese families coming from a colonised
country, having faced extremely traumatic circumstances, resettling in another new colonised country, with other, Western based sets of rules and regulations. They find themselves trying to navigate new rules and laws, and trying to make sense of why institutions such as the Department exist, with statutory powers to protect children.

Fredericks and Adams (2011) highlight that if relationships between the colonisers and the colonised are not considered and challenged, but instead reinstated, then the colonised will continue to be marginalised, denigrated and exploited. Indeed, Abdelkerim and Grace (2012, p. 111) warn that the newly emerging African communities in Australia are facing further compounding levels of disadvantage, and risk being caught up in chronic unemployment and underemployment. This starting point is for South Sudanese families, as they experience the systemic fragmentation of their culture first hand.

As the interviews have repeatedly highlighted, these families have also lost a lot their own sense of identity through the process of colonisation and the ensuing wars:

> It is sad what happened to our country. Our country is very beautiful and we had lots of resources. Lots of resources you know and that is such a sad thing. Now we grieve for Africa. (Participant 37 Kuku female)

While holding on to those past experiences, and the implications these have on their families and community, they then enter another country which also has a long history of colonisation. These dimensions of colonialism are apparent in a whole range of existing bureaucracies and systems, including the colonial heritage of the Department itself.

Young (2004) suggests that the genesis of social work is found in the same conditions which led to the colonisation of Australia, the development of capitalism, the Industrial Revolution and Europe’s White desire to shape the globe in its own image. She argues that social work, which was transported to Australia during the colonising process, now occupies a well-established role in intervening in major social problems, suggesting that one of those problems is ‘child abuse’ and how to keep children safe from harm.

If we also consider the dimensions of colonialism, and the idea that the West is better and superior, in the process silencing and marginalising non-Western populations, then we can see how the Eurocentric starting point is the practice of social workers. In my own practice, I know many times I have quoted the well-known phrase ‘It takes a village to raise a child’, in an attempt to explain how I understand collective parenting from a Western perspective.
When I discussed this concept during an interview, I found this participant held an entirely different view:

You say in order to raise our children we need a village, but there is no village. Some of our people think back to a village but when was that? There was no happy village like they think and there is no village here. We are in suburbs. I can take you to those people, not the ones who tell you they are good people and do nice things but the places you need to see to remove the curtains from your eyes. Households with roaches and places I know you wouldn’t be comfortable where children are having children. Places dads are in and out of prison and you can hear honesty. (Participant 32 Nuer male)

I found this interview confronting, because it made me reconsider my thoughts on how I often visualise a rural village in Africa, full of families with children running around. He stressed to me that my research might only capture the stories people wanted me to hear. This was another key moment for me, as I consider my positioning in the dominant culture, and sense the need to have conversations about how we might start decolonizing practice, in order to allow us to move beyond our own assumptions about families and communities.

Mignolo (2017) suggests that the way to move forward from colonisation is not post-colonialisation. He argues that Eurocentric knowledge has presumed to be universal, and the term post-colonialisation originated in the English-speaking world of England and the United States; therefore, it does not challenge the European ways of knowing and being. He stresses that we need to think of our ways of thinking and doing, which he calls ‘de-linking’. How can a critique of Western knowledge effectively come from Western thinking? Decolonisation originated in the Third World, opening new paradigms to challenge imperial epistemology and moving away from the colonial matrix of power. He argues that decolonisation encourages a new way of being, thinking and doing, suggesting that decoloniality focuses on changing the terms of the conversation and not only the content.

This brings me back to the research question I posed, and I see the question itself started from my own Western positioning, and not where the community members identified their positioning. The question was based on my interpretation of the situation and my ideas about how the community might resolve the issue of community care. It also didn’t start to address the crucial issues that South Sudanese families are experiencing, and the fact that they feel as if their voices are not being heard on multiple levels within society.

To consider how best to move forward, while holding on to the decolonial lens, I think
Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological model (see Figure 7.2), might be a good way of trying to conceptualise families as nested within a micro, meso, eco and macro system.

![Ecological Model](image)

**Critical Consciousness**

*Figure 7.2 Brofrenbrenner’s Ecological Model (adapted)*

Although this model has a Eurocentric starting point, with the individual at the centre, it still allows us to explore the multiple contexts and the complex system of structures families find themselves in.

In this model the individual is placed at the centre of a complex system of structures, some close to the individual, others removed and may have a direct or indirect influence on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of the individual. I cautiously consider this model, because, while it is essentially a functionalist model, it also begins from the Eurocentric starting point, with the individual in the centre. As I outlined previously, it is important to locate the family within community as the starting point, but I think that this approach still allows for the exploration of the multiple contexts families find themselves in.
Examples of the components are:

Macrosystem: the attitudes and ideologies of the culture
Exosystem: local politics, social services, neighbours, media
Mesosystem: the interaction between the various Microsystems, like school and church, school and family, Department and family, etc
Microsystem: family, peers, school, church, health services, social services, etc
Individual: age, gender, health, etc

The ecological model provides a framework that can help us start to understand the effects that dominant models of power have on families, models which were illustrated in workshops in Cycle 4. Rather than talking at parents about parents, the facilitator began the conversations asking participants to talk about their own hopes and fears for their families, and ensuring that they felt they were in a safe space to begin conversations. Similarly, Losoncz (2016) argues the need for creating a culture of trust, respect and communication, and for real dialogue among parents and child protection authorities, to explain the role of keeping children safe.

This is an important starting point, because Kagitcibasi (2005) points out that approaches to parenting workshops often come from a limited Westernised view of the family, which is socially constructed and characterised by middle and upper-class values and norms. These models also assume that all parents have the basic physical resources to parent, and that parenting can take place in the same way. Kagitcibasi (2005) suggests that this does not consider how context may influence what is adequate parenting. There is an assumption that all parents should engage in the same set of parenting behaviours, regardless of their backgrounds, and that for them to do so implies they have the tools to achieve this.

This lack of tools was exposed early on in Week 1, when participants started giving accounts of the many frustrations they were facing daily. One woman explained that she could no longer attend the group after having to move 30 kilometres away to a new suburb. She pointed out that despite a softening rental market, she was constantly being refused leases by private landlords in the local area. Others spoke about the impossibilities of
finding work as cleaners or carers, their struggle with speaking fluent English, and one even speaking about having no power in the home because of financial hardship. By embedding these situations within an ecological system, I think, exposes the systemic inequalities South Sudanese families are facing. While we might try and focus efforts at the individual or micro level, I think that, as practitioners or researchers, we need to be working at the meso level, along with others, to train and empower community members to be challenging the status quo, and exposing issues of racism, oppression, powerlessness and cultural imperialism.

The whole concept of critical consciousness penetrates all aspects of our dealing with the community. Therefore, I have modified the Bronfenbrenner diagram (Figure 8.1) by surrounding all the systems within an area of Critical Consciousness, thus indicating the need for critical interaction and discourse with the community at all levels.

In applying the processes, results and outcomes of the research to my work with the Department, I am drawn to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model, using his approach to develop a specific model which may apply to my own work, and that of other case workers, in the identification, prevention and intervention in problems arising in the South Sudanese community. This model, and its extension, form the basis of the next section.
8.1 Proposed model of practice

Figure 8.1 (infra) is my attempt to design a model, which not only captures the need to build ongoing meaningful relationships between marginalised communities and the Department, but also offers a suggestion of how to work effectively and sensitively with community if intervention is required. I propose that the relationships we need to consider span, not only across prevention/intervention, but also across family and community systems. I suggest that we need to locate the family within the dynamics of the relationships with community and the Department. By locating the proposed model within Brofenbrenner’s Ecological Model adds another dimension, that conceptualises the need to work in the different levels of the microsystem and consider larger systemic influences.

![Diagram of proposed model of practice located within Brofenbrenner's microsystem](image-url)
My research highlights the desire of community members to have relationships with people in the Department, community members who requested ongoing community workshops and education sessions. I believe that by investing in time and relationship building, only then can we move to meaningful conversations with community members, which is summed up in the following statement:

You are addressing them, you are talking to them and making them know. It will not happen in one day, it is a process and as time goes by, things will come right.  
(Participant 40, Bari female)

Relationship building also gives service providers an opportunity to involve community in policy development, or to provide advice on service provision in areas that directly affect them. It allows staff in those agencies, government and non-government, to have points of reference in community that will allow them to better understand the challenges that families from other cultures face, and to consider different methods of practice.

The right-hand side of the model captures the current desires of the 36 participants, who have all raised their hands to become a carer should a child need to enter care. It also offers opportunities to explore ways of working with elders, if families are open to the Department, and suggests ways to involve community in intervention.

I often hear the argument that a lack of resourcing prevents agencies from working in community development, and that resources need to be targeted in the crisis or intervention stage. I believe that by working with families on both sides of the spectrum simultaneously we can start building more effective and responsive partnerships, which should ultimately reduce the need for intervention.

I think the Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model is a useful tool for practitioners and researchers alike to consider how we might work in mainly micro and meso levels with smaller levels of influence, but it remains important to be continually challenging those meso, exo and macro areas and challenging dominant discourses. Sawriker (2009) stresses the importance for caseworkers being able to separate out the effects of non-cultural factors, such as poverty or institutional racism; I believe my model would support this. Practitioners working with families might have limited spheres of power, and might not
be able to influence at the exo and macro levels; but it is still important to become aware, and challenge oppression wherever possible.

One example might be the parenting workshops facilitated by Rebecca Forte and our desire to challenge Western models of parenting. By using storytelling, there may be opportunities to develop narrative therapy approaches within these workshops, and move away from the idea that a South Sudanese parent becomes an awful story of war and trauma, but instead becomes the story of a mother or father wanting to raise their children in a secure and happy environment. This approach centres people as the experts in their own lives and may allow us to better understand families within historical and cultural contexts. Puvimanasinghe et al. (2015) suggest that when refugees express lengthy stories of struggling, their narratives have the potential for communities to collectively share their struggles and heal their divides.

By having conversations about raising children from other cultures in a new country, we may explore and find new ways of honouring South Sudanese traditions, while allowing room to discuss creativity and change. I often hear people saying that they feel that Westerners seem to want to hear the terrible, harrowing stories of their escape from war, and the atrocities that they went through. I also hear that they do not want to be defined by that story, or be known as the woman who had her child shot on her back while running away from gunfire. Instead, this woman talks about how she survived to become a teacher in Kakuma, teaching 200 children the English language, before becoming a teacher in Australia. There is a tendency to want to hear those stores, and to contextualise what people have faced and I am guilty of that. Previously, I have brought community members to full staff meetings to talk about their refugee story, to try and contextualise child protection from a cultural perspective. But I now realise the danger that lies in making people be seen as victims in order to suit our own ends.
8.2 Engagement Matrix

I revisit Freire’s argument, where he states that the masses have no voice, and are excluded from any action role in the transformation of their society because of ‘the culture of silence’. This leads me to an insightful conversation I had with Tim Muirhead, when he scribbled down a rough diagram like the one below (Figure 8.2) showing some different dimensions he observed in community. I think this is a good conceptualization, illustrating how service providers often focus on consulting or working with those in Section A, who are both highly educated and elected leaders in community. There can be a danger that, by working like this, not only for those people to quickly burn out with the increasing demands for consultations, but that they may also become gatekeepers in community. I think it is important, before embarking on research or practitioner engagement, to recognise that participants have very diverse educational backgrounds across all quadrants. I found that while some participants are studying at doctoral level and have high ranking positions in industry, others may have very poor literacy skills due to lack of basic education in their own country of origin, and so can barely write. However, the latter may in fact be highly educated in indigenous ways of knowing and doing.

![Engagement Matrix Diagram]

**Figure 8.2 Engagement Matrix based on Tim Muirhead’s conversation**

As I outlined previously, elections are an important part of governance for many community members who have actively voted for leaders to speak on their behalf. This factor may also become a weakness for Section D, with leaders who have a high status in community, but
may struggle with Western terminology, languages or frameworks, like this particular participant:

I don’t really understand. So how does the whole system work? Lets say a child is taken from home, do they go to an organisation? … Some people say the Department is more likely of protecting their jobs than protecting the kids. (Participant 36 Madi male)

He commands high respect in his community, but this statement also highlights how he is struggling to understand Western models of practice. This participant would likely be unable to alleviate community fears about the role of the Department. Rather than focus on working through concerns like this, I now see how easy it can be to default to those more educated in Western knowledge, but with less inclination to challenge the status quo.

Section B may have those in community who are active and leaders in their own right; these people are not known as elected leaders, but are still key people to liaise with. I found lots of younger people in this bracket who have embraced the Australian context through work or study, and provide mentoring to other young people in an informal way.

I would suggest that Section C in the diagram is where those excluded voices are situated, and what I consider imperative that we continually find ways of engaging and listening to those marginalised community members:

Ever since I came here I am not going out. I hear them announce at church about a child protection workshop. I picked interest and said this is good. I want to hear this. (Participant 37 Kuku female)

I was surprised that this participant was not linked to mainstream services and, indeed, her only contact with the extended community seemed to be through her church. I would argue that adopting a transformative approach would enable researchers to directly link with participants such as this, and hear more about the issues that she, and others in a similar position face.

I reflect now on how I began engaging with those in Section A; but I think that the action research methodology has allowed me to move into the other quadrants as the process continued and relationships were developed. I note that Fanon (1970) states that colonised people try to master the ways of the coloniser in a hope to be seen as more human by the
coloniser. If we consider this statement in relation to participants in Section A, it could be argued that we often default to engaging with those who are more educated in Western ways. The danger in doing so, as Fanon (1970) states, is that, by trying to become more Westernized, the colonised can then become more alienated from their own people. So, again I would suggest that there is a danger in doing more harm than good in community if we only focus on those in Section A. I therefore think that it remains important to actively work across all four sectors and to try and hear all South Sudanese worldviews holistically. If we try and understand more about people’s lived experiences and cultural knowledge, then we also might begin to understand how families are embedded within the multiple layers of colonial legacies.
Chapter 9 Conclusion

To conclude, I revisit McNiff and Whitehead (2011), who encourage us as action researchers to avoid epistemological closure, and to never believe that our knowledge is complete, or that there is no more to learn. I find that for me, the contrary has happened; because of this transformative approach to inquiry, my study has only created more curiosity to consider new ways of practising and researching. My reflection on what I have learned from this action research broadly falls into two main theoretical constructs.

The first is locating the research within a colonial and decolonial context, enabling researchers and practitioners to consider ways of beginning to dismantle practice. By considering the South Sudanese community through a colonial lens, alongside the colonial imposts such as the Department, we begin to understand the long-term effects that colonisation is still having today. When referring to Western child protection systems Young (2004) argues that the system of training and acculturation to a world view is so persuasive and relatively unchanged, that it may be seen in the way certain models for practice, such as anti-racist or counter-oppressive approaches, build on these theoretical explanations of the work rather than dismantle them.

Thinking about the underlying codes of imperialism and power relations now makes me challenge myself to consider terminology I use daily basis, such as empowerment or strengths-based working. I now consider how these terms and models within the ecological model are still imbedded within the existing hegemonic power structures. Empowerment does not offer any room for structural change and strength-based does not challenge the status quo.

Another key theoretical construct I reflect on are the principles underpinning action research itself. Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 172) suggests that as Europeans began to explore and colonize other parts of the world, they brought with them Western research traditions, producing them in a scientific and ‘superior’ way. Smith also questions the relationship between knowledge and power, between research and emancipation, and between lived reality and imposed ideals about the Other (p. 167).
I argue that action research creates opportunities to address some of these concerns by moving away from a positivist approach, and attempting to move away from tokenistic participation. I would also argue that this sits well alongside the decolonial context, which is summed up by Stringer (2014):

> Knowledge acquisition or production proceeds as a collective process, engaging people who have previously been the “subjects” of research in the process of defining and redefining the corpus of understanding on which their community is based. Stringer (2014, p. 15)

I consider my initial question sitting alongside the desire to let participants be heard, and to have their voices dominate the research. At the start, I was keen to drive a community-led, bottom-up transformative approach. Now, I realise that my thesis turned into more of a narrative account, with my own voice pausing throughout as I had key moments of self-reflection. There are still dangers, as Mertens et al (2009, p. 67) highlights, that even in collaborative research with First World and Third World researchers, the First World researcher’s voice is dominant, and determines what type of knowledge can be produced. On occasions, I found my research frustrating, because I was enthusiastic about the idea of community action and developing new ground-up initiatives. But then, I consider the work of Jack Whitehead (2006, p. 159), when he describes action researchers as practitioners who need to become competent researchers and generators of educational knowledge and theory.

This illustrates to me how important it is for practitioners to ask ‘How do I improve my own practice?’; I reflect now that this had to be my starting point, because I had many moments of realisation throughout the research which I think allowed a transformational process of self-study. I realise how important it is for me to consider my own practice, before being able to move forward into any kind of action. As I developed the research findings into a power point presentation to seek feedback from community, this was a key statement of endorsement for me:

> What you have learned doing your research and talking to everyone in our South Sudanese community, every worker in DCP should learn. You have a duty now to go and teach this to every DCP office and have them understand. (Participant 1 South Sudanese President WA)
You will hear in this statement, that the President is not reflecting on what actions came from the research itself, but more so, on how insights from community members themselves had influenced my own thinking. I found this a humbling experience; I realise now how I was so enthused at trying to get action in community, and in achieving results, that it took me to this point in my research to realise that, in fact, it was me as a researcher and practitioner that needed to be educated and not the other way around. This idea of humility is highlighted by Ledwith (2007), who argues that researchers should adopt a position of humility, not arrogance, and to challenge themselves to consider whose truth they are telling. She stresses that we must involve an analysis of power from a perspective of difference, to dislodge white patriarchal Western power, and engage in multiple truth.

The President has read my final thesis draft, and made a few minor suggested changes but overall, he has endorsed what I have written, and I highly value his opinion. I am now keen to sit with him, and others in community, to move into a deeper conversation about how we might start considering if decolonial models of social work are worth exploring further.

In a recent article, Mignolo (2017) notes that problems faced by contemporary social workers can be traced to the power relationship and the control of Native lives by a foreign power. He stresses that in the midst of Western societies that pride themselves on their respect for freedom, the freedom of indigenous people to realise their own goals have been extinguished by the state in law and, to a great degree, in practice (p. 44). I realise now that I do find myself in a position of unearned privileges, having grown up as part of the dominant culture that has contributed to the position of power I find myself in. It is therefore imperative, as Hendrick and Young (2017) urge, that unless there is an honest understanding of, and engagement with the complexities of racial experiences which disempower and dispossess, we cannot begin to build productive relationships.
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Appendices

Appendix A - CaLD Working Group poster to recruit carers in 2010

Open your heart to a child in need!

Foster care is about helping children in the community.

Call 1800 024 453 or visit www.childprotection.wa.gov.au to find out more about fostering.
Appendix B - Participant Information Form

Participant Information Form

Research Title: How can the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) develop a South Sudanese Community Carers’ model?

Researcher: Caroline Speirs       Research Supervisor: Dr Susan Young

Thank you for your interest in this Action Research about how CPFS could develop a community care model for South Sudanese families. I wish to conduct focus groups and unstructured interviews with South Sudanese community members to gain an understanding of your perspectives and what you think is important for CPFS to know and understand about appropriate models of care.

This information sheet tells you about what I am trying to find out through this project, what your involvement would include, and what your rights are as a potential participant.

Who I am seeking to participate in a focus group for the research?

- South Sudanese community members who are willing to share their ideas about what they believe is important for CPFS to know about community carers and how this might be developed.

What does your participation involve?

- Participating in Action Research focus groups facilitated by myself and a South Sudanese leader who will hear about your ideas of what a community care model looks like.
- The focus group will take place at a venue easily accessible for you and at an agreed time believed to be convenient for most members of the community.

Responses in the focus groups will be audio recorded and may be used in publications; however your identity will remain confidential.

Who I am seeking to interview for the research?

- I am interested to interview South Sudanese community members who are willing to talk about topics such as parenting or community led models of care.

The benefits of your participation are that it gives you the opportunity to provide feedback to CPFS on how to improve care requirements for children from a South Sudanese background.

I do not anticipate there is any risk associated with your involvement from this research, however, should the interview process raise any personal concerns for you, you may withdraw at any time and you will be provided with information for follow up support. If you
become upset in the course of the discussions, I will be able to put you in contact with support services. Additionally if any information comes to light that might cause harm or danger to a child, I have a duty to disclose this information to the Department for Child Protection and Family Support.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without any prejudice.

If you decide to withdraw you do not have to give any reason or justification for withdrawing. In the event of your withdrawal from participation your records will be destroyed unless you agree that I can retain and use the information you have provided to date.

With your consent the focus group will be audio-taped and later transcribed. Your name will not be recorded on the audio device. The audio tapes will subsequently be stored in a secure cabinet in the Chief Investigator’s office for a period of seven years after which time the recordings will be erased. All information provided will be treated as confidential, meaning that your name and other information that might identify you will not be used in the research and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia (UWA), in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with myself or my supervisor at any time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at UWA on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to hreo-research@uwa.edu.au

All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

If you are willing to be involved in the focus group or unstructured interview or if you have any further questions please contact Caroline Speirs 042 777 6573 or 21550543@student.uwa.edu.au or Dr Susan Young 6488 2992 susan.young@uwa.edu.au

Sincerely,

Chief Investigator

Dr Susan Young

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia with reference number RA/4/1/xxxx, in accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any time. In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Ethics office at UWA on (08) 6488 4703 or by emailing to humanethics@uwa.edu.au. All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.
Appendix C - Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Research Title: How can the Department for Child Protection and Family Support develop a South Sudanese Community Carers’ model?
Researcher: Caroline Speirs       Research Supervisor: Dr Susan Young

I …………………………………………………………………………………………………

agree to take part in the above study

1. I have received and read a copy of the Participant Information Form regarding this study
2. I am aware that taking part in the study will not affect any service I receive
3. I understand all the information shared will be treated confidentially; however I am aware that if I tell you
   or others at risk of harm then I have a duty to speak to somebody about this.
4. I am aware my participation in this study is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without any
   prejudice.
5. I am aware that interviews and focus groups will be audio and/or video recorded

I agree to take part in (tick all that apply)

☐ Focus groups only
☐ Unstructured interviews only
☐ Focus groups and unstructured interviews

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this study

Participant signature ____________________________ Date __________

Approval to conduct this research has been provided by the University of Western Australia, in
accordance with its ethics review and approval procedures. Any person considering participation in this
research project, or agreeing to participate, may raise any questions or issues with the researchers at any
time.

In addition, any person not satisfied with the response of researchers may raise ethics issues or
concerns, and may make any complaints about this research project by contacting the Human Ethics
Office at the University of Western Australia on (08) 6488 3703 or by emailing to
humanethics@uwa.edu.au

All research participants are entitled to retain a copy of any Participant Information Form and/or
Participant Consent Form relating to this research project.

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Appendix D - Letter of ethical approval

Our Ref: RA/4/1/8836

24 February 2017

Dr Susan Young
School of Population and Global Health
MBDP: M401

Dear Doctor Young

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL - THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

How can the Department for Child Protection and Family Support develop a South Sudanese Community Carers’ model?

Ethics approval for the above project has been granted in accordance with the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Statement) and the policies and procedures of The University of Western Australia. Please note that the period of ethics approval for this project is five (5) years from the date of this notification. However, ethics approval is conditional upon the submission of satisfactory progress reports by the designated renewal date. Therefore initial approval has been granted from 24 February 2017 to 23 February 2022.

You are reminded of the following requirements:

1. The application and all supporting documentation form the basis of the ethics approval and you must not depart from the research protocol that has been approved.
2. The Human Ethics office must be approached for approval in advance for any requested amendments to the approved research protocol.
3. The Chief Investigator is required to report immediately to the Human Ethics office any adverse or unexpected event or any other event that may impact on the ethics approval for the project.
4. The Chief Investigator must submit a final report upon project completion, even if a research project is discontinued before the anticipated date of completion.

Any conditions of ethics approval that have been imposed are listed below:

Special Conditions

None specified

The University of Western Australia is bound by the National Statement to monitor the progress of all approved projects until completion to ensure continued compliance with ethical principles.

The Human Ethics office will forward a request for a Progress Report approximately 30 days before the due date.

If you have any queries please contact the Human Ethics office at humanethics@uwa.edu.au.

Please ensure that you quote the file reference – RA/4/1/8836 – and the associated project title in all future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]
Appendix 5.4.1 Poster advertising event

South Sudanese Event
Saturday 16th September 2017
Herb Graham Centre
12 – 3pm

In response to questions raised by community members
- WA Police
- Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support

Community conversations - Where do we go from here?

Appendix 5.4.2 Event agenda
Agenda

1. Acknowledgement of Wadjak country

2. Introduction by Lucy Amoo, Acholi Women's Leader - why are we here today? Who is here?

3. Following on from previous South Sudanese Forum and current community conversations:

Fear of WA Police by parents: What happens if my son/daughter calls Police? How can I stop my teenagers getting in to trouble?

When can elders be involved in DCP cases? When are children removed? Where do they go? How can a partnership be established between community & government departments.

2 Interactive sessions (Myths & Questions)

* WA Police, Senior Constable Terry Welsh, Mirrabooka Police

* Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support
  Peter Tulip, Assistant District Director & Caroline Speirs Specialist
  Community Child Protection worker.

Break 2.00pm (coffee)

Listening exercise What can we do together? Brainstorm session - Metro Migrant Resource Centre, Communities For Children, Ngala - Are there ways we can respond to support South Sudanese parents in Australia?

3.00pm Close

Workshop with Tim Muirhead Focusing on Family Matters
South Sudanese Conversations

Tuesday 19th September 2017
5.00pm onwards
Department of Communities Offices, Mirrabooka

Hear from Department Communities, Child Protection Division
Why might children enter care?
Could South Sudanese families look after children?
Is there a model of community care to explore?
Appendix 5.4.5 Nurturing Families poster

Nurturing Families

10th March 2018
(6 Saturday Sessions)
City of Stirling Library Mirrabooka
21 Sudbury Road, Mirrabooka

Proudly supported by:
Ngala, City of Stirling, Department of Communities,
Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre
Appendix 6 Raw Data example
Transcript of an individual interview in Cycle 3 (Interview 38) 21/11/2017

R Back home, even if you just do a child like this we call it a beating, where as it sounds here as worse, something I’ve realised here is the police or anyone in Australia who hear that they think oh Africans are bad, they beat their children. We don’t do that to our children.

I So if the police said to you, you assaulted your child? What does the word assault mean?

R Assault to us means according to my understanding, it’s like something big, it’s like doing bad thing to my child. Whereby I’m not doing it but, it’s just understanding, I don’t know…

I So what do you think the DCP, the Department could do to help around this, about parents feeling powerless?

R I think if the Department give us the chance we parents to deal with our own children in our own way, let them just give us that chance, let us deal the way we want to deal with it and let them just watch out and see if it works or not. Because we really, it’s really affecting the community, the fact that children don’t listen to us, we are powerless, we feel now what is our role as parents, you know. You don’t know where your son or your daughter is and she doesn’t listen, then the DCP talk to them they listen, but what they go and do there is not good, some of the kids even they come and tell us how they are handled. Because DCP, okay the high people will be only in the office, but they don’t know exactly what is down in the ground, wherever the children are kept, you know, bad things have been done by the lower people who look after them, whereby the high people in the office they don’t know what’s down here. They are just in the office, saying ok these kids have to be taken away from the parents, but they are not there 24/7, they do not know what is under there.

My reflection on Interview 38 Copy of extract personal reflection journal (November 2018)

Themes in Cycle 3 - Themes to group together -
disempowerment/fear/parenting/powerless/terminology used

Moving into the final cycle 3= I thought by now I’d be at the point of moving to community care. Interviews still focus on powerlessness. Where to go from here? Interview grouped with other similar interviews in NVIVO. When I highlight key words you can hear the power bias. More depth conversation in this interview as the cycles have evolved. What are group members going to want in the 3rd cycle?