



Our Kids Belong With Family: Rarriwuy Hick finds mass support for social media campaign

By national Indigenous affairs correspondent Bridget Brennan

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PHOTO: Rarriwuy Hick and Meyne Wyatt believe Aboriginal families are constantly having to prove themselves. (ABC News: Bridget Brennan)

When her family faced a traumatic separation from some young relatives, Australian actress Rarriwuy Hick channelled people power to spread a simple message: Our Kids Belong With Family.

The hashtag #ourkidsbelongwithfamily is now widely used by Indigenous Australians around the country, and has become a rallying cry to help families stay connected with their children.

"Our Kids Belong With Family is about children knowing who their biological family are, it has nothing to do with race in particular," Ms Hick said.

"They know where they come from, whether that's Arnhem Land to Alice Springs, all the way to London."

The campaign has resonated with families from all walks of life, Ms Hick's partner Meyne Wyatt said.

"We said, OK, we're going to use social media. The positivity in that is that we had so many people come out and stand in solidarity with us — Indigenous and non-Indigenous people — to come out and say #ourkidsbelongwithfamily," he said.

Ms Hick added it had been a big journey for the family.

"One of the hardest journeys we've had, I think, as a family, but we've overcome a lot of those things and I think our family is stronger for it," she said.

Her young relatives are now living with family members and are thriving, speaking language, and learning about their ties to their ancestral lands.

"It's been wonderful," Ms Hick's father Paul said, but added the children were dealing with a "huge level of insecurity".

"The little one had a lot of anger, he still gets angry at times, because he couldn't really understand what's happening," he said.

"And really, he's improved dramatically, and it's taken a lot of careful work with him but also being in a safe, stable family."



'We strongly believe kids have to stay with family'

Since the family's campaign launched a little over a year ago, Mr Hick has spoken with several families struggling to navigate the complex child protection system or to prove they can find a relative to care for children who have been removed.

"There were people up in Arnhem Land who had no idea — the children just disappeared," he said.

"They were really fighting against a very powerful, a fearsome system. Quite a few of those people, yes, they lost touch.

"Their children and grandchildren found it very hard for them to get back in touch.

"We strongly believe kids have got to stay with family, that said it's got to be a very strong and stable family, there are many instances where you do have strong and stable families who are overlooked."

Of the nearly 48,000 Australian children who are in out-of-home care, a third are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle denotes that the top preference for finding a home for Indigenous children is a relative, or someone in the child's Indigenous community.



PHOTO: There are nearly 48,000 Australian kids in out-of-home care. (ABC News: Bridget Brennan)

Fighting stereotypes and stigma

This past year — and recent debate in the media over the placement of Aboriginal children — has taken a toll on Ms Hick, a Yolngu woman, who hails from Dhalinybuy, a tiny community in north-east Arnhem Land.

A Channel Seven Sunrise segment on Indigenous children was removed after widespread backlash and protests.

"It has deeply affected me," Ms Hick said. "But I'm so glad that we live in a time where we have social media, coming out with our campaign ... has raised a lot of awareness."

Mr Wyatt said Aboriginal families were constantly having to prove themselves.

"We were both really offended, upset, and I'm sure every other Indigenous person who has been in that situation, is feeling the same thing," he said.

"These people coming out with these negative comments [are] reinforcing negative stereotypes — and the connotations that apply with those types of words, are 'saved', 'abuse', 'neglect'.

"These are ideas in mainstream media that have been pushed on our community time and time again, and we all know that there are these types of people in all communities."