

# Responding to Anglicare call for First Nations dolls

The Parish of Gold Coast North is very involved with First Nations issues. They do a range of activities, including this one where they partnered with Anglicare.

“Our group took up the challenge to create specially-made dolls for First Nations children in care...Unlike the usual activity of plain knitting or crocheting with donated materials, this mission required planning and problem solving. Members raided their own collections of cloth, or bought stuffing and appropriately patterned dress material, exchanged patterns and ideas and brought their energy and skills along to meetings to share ideas,” says Roselyn Drake from St Matthew’s Church, Coomera.

On a Tuesday morning in May, the Coomera Craft Circle, meeting at St Matthew’s Church were busy making rugs and other knitted and crocheted items for local people sleeping rough who are helped by St John’s Crisis Care, Surfers Paradise. This group of parishioners and other community members had been meeting, chatting, crafting and sharing morning tea for quite a few years. Our group had started off in a parishioner’s home and when she moved away, we commenced meeting in the newly-built church building.

This particular May morning, we were expecting Anglicare Cultural Support Worker and Kuku Yalanji woman Lalanía Tusa, from the nearby suburb of Nerang, to join us. She was visiting our church to collect nearly 40 First Nations dolls and other toys we had been making for the more than 70 First Nations children in foster care on the Gold Coast who Lalanía helps care for.

Late last year, Lalanía had been guest speaker at an afternoon tea event at St Matt’s when she mentioned, over a cuppa, that she had trouble finding suitable simple dolls, and other toys, that could provide a welcoming and appropriate gift for First Nations children newly arriving in foster care. Sometimes these children are taken suddenly by police or safety officers and are unable to bring any familiar possessions with them.

## DIRECT SERVICE

Projects that provide a service or product to an individual, group, or the community as a whole. This is typically how community work has been expressed historically. The risk of disempowering people by doing things for them rather than with them, should be considered when using this approach. However, it is still a valid expression of community engagement, when people are treated with dignity and respect, and when the approach is one of a suite of complementary approaches in a community. Examples include filling a volunteer shift at a local organisation, creating social media tools for an organisation, or creating a community mural.



After lovingly making these dolls, we were ready to give the first batch of over 35 dolls and woolen toys to Lalanía. She presented our Coomera Craft Circle with a plaque that she had painted with a serpent to express her thanks and promised to come by another day to tell us how the children responded to the dolls. "When she took the gifts back to her office, Lalanía's manager and fellow workers were amazed and delighted with the beautiful collection and eager to give them to First Nations children in care."

Meeting every two weeks, the Coomera Craft Circle now has two strings to its bow, with two different groups of neighbours in need, as we create warm goods for people sleeping rough on the Gold Coast and dolls and toys to comfort First Nations children who Anglicare helps care for. The Circle does not follow an assembly line pattern of manufacture, as every rug and every doll is unique, but all gifts share in common the driving motivation to offer some comfort to neighbours in need.

The doll-making initiative was an interesting project, starting with wild enthusiasm, dwindling to concern as we at times wondered how best to make the dolls and slowly feeling our way through the creative process, to finally having a beautiful bundle to hand over to Lalanía for distribution to the children.

Anglicare Southern Queensland posted the following on their Facebook page after receiving the dolls and toys: "We couldn't do what we do without the thoughtfulness of our community around us. The amazing craft group at St Matthew's Anglican Church kindly volunteered their time and handmade a range of beautiful First Nations dolls to give to children in care. Our foster care team were overjoyed to receive the carefully made treasures that will provide comfort to the young people."



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What First Peoples cultural sensitivities might need to be taken into account for this project?
- How could doll makers, or others working with First Peoples, learn more about the relevant cultural awareness if they aren't sure how to proceed?

## MORE INFORMATION

Contact The Parish of Gold Coast  
North: 5580 5814.

Visit the University of Minnesota  
Morris website.

Refer to the book *Community and Ministry: An Introduction To Community Work In A Christian Context* (pp. 43-45).