

combined voices

Demanding
better outcomes
for Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander Children

Launch:
4th August 2009

stating the case for change

INTRODUCTION

Queensland's current approach to ensuring the safety and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families is not working. Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are experiencing poor outcomes in terms of their safety, education and health. As a result they are unable to achieve their potential and the cycle of disadvantage continues.

In response to these issues, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peak bodies, representative groups and individuals have combined to voice their concerns and strive to ensure that all children are safe, well and able to achieve their potential in Queensland.

Key voices in this campaign include:

- Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Organisations
- Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS)
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd (QATSICPP)
- PeakCare Queensland
- CREATE Foundation
- Child and family welfare professionals.

It is time for a new approach to child and family welfare that acknowledges and builds capacity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities toward sustainable solutions.

MISSION

To increase governments', government departments' and non-government services' awareness of the issues impacting on vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

To increase governments', government departments' and non-government services' awareness of the failure of existing approaches to child and family welfare and the need for systemic reform to improve outcomes.

To lead the identification and implementation of new ways to ensure the safety and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

THE ISSUE – What is the problem?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do not have the same life chances as other Australian children. They experience poorer outcomes in relation to their safety, education and health than do non-Indigenous children.

THE FACTS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise only 6.3% of children aged 0-17 in Queensland.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child protection data shows that when compared with non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented at all stages of the child protection intervention process. In addition, the levels of over-representation increase the further children proceed within the intervention process.

In Queensland, 1 in 7 children and 1 in 4.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have had some form of contact with the child protection system.

In 2007-08, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were:

- 3.3 times more likely to be notified for alleged harm or risk of harm
- 4.0 times more likely to be substantiated for abuse or neglect
- 6.4 times more likely to be subject to a care and protection order
- 6.6 times more likely to be living away from home.

Since 2004, the level of over-representation at each stage of the child protection process has increased significantly.

| | 2003-04 | 2007-08 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|
| NOTIFICATIONS | 1.2 | 3.3 |
| SUBSTANTIATIONS | 1.5 | 4.0 |
| CHILD PROTECTION ORDERS | 4.5 | 6.4 |
| LIVING AWAY FROM HOME | 3.9 | 6.6 |

Further, once removed from their families care, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not supported to maintain their connections with family, community and culture.

As of 30th June 2008, only 56.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with a kinship or Indigenous carer.

Reports of Community Visitors during April and May 2007 indicate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care had limited contact with their families

- 13% of children had regular contact with their extended family
- 12% of children had phone contact with a member of their family or a person of significance.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

In 2006-07, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 10-17

- were 13.1 times more likely to be on youth justice supervision orders
- made up 62.7% of the children and young people in youth detention centres (based on average daily numbers).

HOMELESSNESS

- In 2006-07, 32.3% of children accompanying an adult using SAAP services were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

HEALTH

- During 2004-06, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were twice as likely to have a low birth weight baby as non-Indigenous women.
- During 2005-07 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in were twice as likely to die between the ages of 0-4 as non-Indigenous children.

EDUCATION

- Only 11% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged four years access preschool compared to the Australian average of 46%.
- Only 45% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people complete year 12 as compared to 86% of non-Indigenous young people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are less likely to attend tertiary education.

WHY ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN SO BAD?

DUE TO:

- Denial of cultural processes and structures for ensuring the safety and well being of children in the context of their families and communities.
- Continued impact of past policies and practices of forced separations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and their children.
- Lack of child and family services to support vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and prevent abuse and neglect.
- Severe social and economic disadvantage – poverty, poor nutrition, poor housing, low education levels and high unemployment – along with social marginalisation, discrimination and racism.
- Long term failure of governments to
 - o provide culturally appropriate services and infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and
 - o address the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by people in urban, regional, rural and remote communities.

WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS CAMPAIGN?

To improve the safety and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and stop their over representation by 2020.

THE CRISIS CAN BE SOLVED

A partnership between government, government departments and non-government organisations that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to take responsibility for solutions will solve the crisis.

This can be done. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up only 6.3% (approximately 63,000) of the population aged 0-17 in Queensland. Of these children, approximately 14,000 (22.2%) have had some form of contact with the child protection system. Queensland has the resources to address this problem.

We can also draw on the experience of New Zealand and Canada and the strategies they have used in their attempts to address disadvantage and the over-representation of First Nations peoples in child and family welfare.

WHAT ARE WE ASKING GOVERNMENTS TO DO?

Combined Voices seeks to work with government to develop new and more effective responses to ensure the safety and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families including:

1. Increasing funding for child and family support services by \$105m¹
2. Increasing the proportion of total child and family support service funds allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to 19%
3. Developing a child and family service strategy and implementing an action plan that acknowledges and addresses the vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
4. Linking the child and family service strategy to COAG's commitment to 'close the gap' by addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

We will know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe and well when their representation across key indicators is proportionate to their representation in the population and when compliance requirements have been achieved. The following targets² have been set for the key indicators over time.

| Indicator | 2008 % | 2010 % | 2015 % | 2020 % |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Children notified for alleged harm or risk of harm | 19.2 | 16.0 | 10.0 | 6.3 |
| Children substantiated for abuse or neglect | 22.1 | 18.0 | 12.0 | 6.3 |
| Children subject to a care and protection order | 31.5 | 25.0 | 15.0 | 6.3 |
| Children placed with kin or Indigenous carers | 56.7 | 70.0 | 90.0 | 100 |
| Children having regular contact with their extended families | 13 | 70.0 | 90.0 | 100 |
| Children living away from home | 31.9 | 25.0 | 15.0 | 6.3 |

¹ This figure is based on 25% of the Child Safety Budget (\$638m) and an estimate of \$55m currently being spent on family support. In 2002, the then Labor Government committed to increase its investment in prevention and early intervention to 25% of the then Department of Families budget.

² These targets will need to be adjusted in line with population growth and any changes in representation.

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|-----|
| Children and young people on youth justice supervision orders | 46.6 | 30.0 | 15.0 | 5.9 |
| Children and young people in youth detention | 62.7 | 45.0 | 25.0 | 5.9 |
| Children and families using SAAP services | 32.3 | 25.0 | 15.0 | 6.3 |

However, significant reductions in these key indicators of safety and well being will not be possible until other areas of disadvantage in health and education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and are addressed. Indicators include:

- A reduction in the number and proportion of low birth weight babies
- A reduction in the number and proportion of children who die between the ages of 0-4
- An increase in the number and proportion of children accessing pre-school
- An increase in the number and proportion of young people who complete year 12
- An increase in the number and proportion of young people who enter tertiary education

Concurrent government action will therefore be required in these areas.

MYTHS

Myth No.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents cannot look after their children properly

- Most parents experience some difficulties in looking after for their children at some point in their lives and need support from their families, friends and others in their community. Some parents need assistance from services.
- A survey of 2,400 Aboriginal parents (primary carers) in Western Australia found that the majority of Aboriginal families function very well. This is consistent with studies of the total population, which have highlighted that Australian families generally function very well.
- Families that do not experience alcohol problems in the house, and where children have healthy diets, and carers have reasonable parenting skills or hold strong spiritual/religious beliefs are more likely to have very good family functioning.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to be poorer, less educated and have less access to child and family support, health and education services than other Australians. Families facing these issues are likely to have some difficulty in caring for their children and need assistance.

Myth No.2 Disadvantage and difficulties caring for children are only experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities

- Whilst a lot of media and government attention is given to issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in remote communities, the population is spread throughout Queensland and disadvantage and difficulties caring for children is also experienced by people living in urban and regional areas.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live all throughout Queensland, 26% live in 'major cities', 20% live in 'inner regional' areas, 32% live in 'outer regional' areas and 22% live in 'remote' or 'very remote' areas.

- Strategies to address disadvantage and support families in the care of their children will therefore need to acknowledge and address the different contexts in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live.

Myth No.3 Patterns of abuse and neglect are the same for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children

- Abuse and neglect is categorised and reported by statutory departments in terms of four types of harm; physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.
- Notifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are more likely to be substantiated for neglect (35.8%) than physical abuse (30.0%), emotional abuse (29.4%) or sexual abuse (4.9%). Whilst notifications of non-Indigenous children are more likely to be substantiated for emotional abuse (36.9%) than physical abuse (27.2%), neglect (25.2%) or sexual abuse (8.7%)³.
- These patterns and differences are significant as there is increasing evidence that our responses need to be tailored to the type of harm and address the associated factors. In relation to neglect, poverty is a significant factor that must be addressed. Whilst in emotional abuse, family violence is a significant factor that must be addressed.

Myth No.4 State government funds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to provide child and family support services

- Only three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are funded to provide child and family support services in South-East Queensland, whilst a total of nine organisations are funded across Queensland (funded under the Department of Communities Family Support Program).
- There are not enough organisations funded to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to prevent difficulties from arising and, when they do, to sort them out before they become more serious.

Myth No.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families should use the same services as everybody else

- Being Australian doesn't mean that we are all the same, or have the same needs. Australians come from all over the world and live in cities, suburbs, country towns and remote communities... and we bring with us our cultural differences and differing needs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians may choose to use the same services available to other Australians, but they often face a lack of understanding of their culture and the continuing impact of the forced separation of children from their families and communities, and, in some instances, discrimination when they do use these services. For these reasons, some will not seek assistance.
- In some parts of Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up the majority of the population or a significant proportion of the population in need. In these instances, it makes sense that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and organisations should be funded to provide child and family support services. In other areas, where the number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is smaller, direct input and control is still important but the way in which services are organised and delivered may need to be different.
- When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have input and control over the delivery of services, their outcomes are usually better.

³ These percentages relate to the number of notifications substantiated not the total number of children

Myth No.6 There is no capacity in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to manage the services required

- The younger age, higher proportion of children experiencing difficulties, small number of funded organisations, and small size of funded organisations are often used to argue that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities do not have the capacity to manage and provide the services required.
- Whilst the factors referred to are true, the inference drawn is not. The capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, groups and organisations must be acknowledged and built upon.
- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and organisations struggle with government funding processes and must compete with non-Indigenous groups and organisations for limited funds.
- There are a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups in Queensland (including Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, organisations funded to provide Recognised Entity functions, family intervention services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services) that provide a foundation for building capacity.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

- Responsibility lies primarily with the State and Commonwealth Governments that have control over policy implementation, funding provision and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to identify and put in place sustainable solutions that ensure the safety and well being of children.
- Responsibility also lies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people and organisations to :
 - o let our political leaders know that the crisis facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families requires urgent action and commitment
 - o work in partnership with governments to address the issues and solve this crisis.

WHAT ARE WE ASKING QUEENSLAND INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS TO DO?

- The Combined Voices for Children Campaign is all about building a commitment to achieving the safety, wellbeing and equality of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland.
- We believe that this crisis can be turned around with appropriate resources and political support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- We seek your support for the campaign and ask you to
 - o spread the word about the issues and actions sought in your organisation and networks
 - o inform your local State and Commonwealth members of the issues and actions sought.