



25 still
Years going
1983–2008 strong

SNAICC NEWS

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Secretariat of National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care Newsletter

July 2008



EDITORIAL

Building a National Child Protection Framework

By Julian Pocock,
SNAICC Executive Officer

In May the Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin, MP, released a discussion paper proposing the development of a national child protection framework. Titled *Australia's Children: Safe and Well*, the discussion paper (available at www.fahcsia.gov.au) canvassed a number of reform options that could be pursued across all states and territories through cooperation between the Federal government, state and territory governments and community sector organisations.

During 2007 a coalition of over fifty community sector organisations (including

SNAICC) prepared a briefing paper advocating a national approach to children's safety and well-being. In December the coalition wrote to the newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, seeking a meeting and his agreement that a national child protection strategy be developed as an early priority of the new government. Prior to the election the ALP had committed to establish a national child protection framework.

Recent child neglect cases and child deaths reported in the media prompted the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to elevate child protection and the development of the framework to the agenda for their July meeting. COAG resolved to prioritise improve information sharing about children and families at

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Julian Pocock celebrates
10 years at SNAICC



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The photographs in this publication are intended for illustrative purposes only. No inference is intended or implied that the children or adults depicted in the photographs are the subject of any issue(s) raised in this newsletter.

Contributions, feedback and suggestions to *SNAICC News* are welcome. Copy deadline for our **October** edition is **8 September 2008**.

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Welcome to the winter 2008 edition of *SNAICC News*, with an eight-page **Special Focus on the theme of Health and Nutrition** – of course with a special relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Australia has seen a groundswell of public concern about the inequality in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This groundswell has seen over 120,000 Australians of all walks of life sign the pledge to 'Close the Gap' in Indigenous health disadvantage as part of the Close the Gap Campaign (see **page 12**), and seen the federal, state and territory governments, through COAG, commit to halve the child mortality rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five years old within five years.

A key aspect of the health disadvantage our children experience is in their nutrition and their poor access to healthy, affordable and readily available fresh food (**page 13**). However, as shown in the various case studies in this edition, it is heartening that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations have been working away on improving children's health and nutrition for a long time – and are successful at it! What is also clear is the importance of the leadership shown by the Aboriginal health peak body, NACCHO, in this area (**page 11**).

4 August is National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, as you may also be aware (**page 6**). SNAICC wishes you all **Happy Children's Day!**

In this edition, we have our usual update on SNAICC's work, including our latest resources, so do check out these new publications. I also wish to remind you that 2008 is SNAICC's **25th Anniversary**. Please share with us your recollections and stories of your experiences working with SNAICC over the last quarter century to help us mark our silver anniversary in our newsletter coverage. I look forward to hearing from you.

– Mark Lawrence, Publications Officer

Deadlines and themes for *SNAICC News*

Next edition: October 2008

Theme: Focus on Torres Strait Islander communities

We want to hear your stories, news and case studies on the needs of, as well as services and programs for, Torres Strait Islander pre-schoolers, children, young people, and families – whether on the Islands or on the mainland.

Send us your story or perspective for the next edition of *SNAICC News* **before 8 September 2008**.

In 2008–2009, each newsletter edition will have a theme, with a key article on the theme and a case studies of resources and services offering more information or support. We welcome readers' contributions, suggestions and articles addressing the theme. The themes are generally in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

All contributions of announcements, articles, reviews or news to SNAICC's quarterly newsletter should be sent to us no later than the deadlines listed below.

Edition	Copy Deadline	Theme
January 2009	26 May 08	TBA (For release in mid-December 2008)
April 2009	25 August 08	TBA

Each edition is usually mailed out the first week of the month the edition is named for.

Contact Mark at SNAICC for details:
telephone (03) 9489 8099; email: publications@snaicc.asn.au

EDITORIAL

Building a National Child Protection Framework

risk amongst state governments and non-government organisations. They also agreed to consider the draft national child protection framework in December.

SNAICC notes the announcement from the COAG meeting on 3 July of a national partnership funding package focused on Indigenous children and the early years as part of the COAG Indigenous reform agenda. This is a welcome development and it would be pertinent to link the development of specific areas for funding to prevention and early intervention elements of the national child protection framework. COAG agreed in principle to a National Partnership with joint funding of around \$547.2 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years.

“Decision making in matters pertaining to child welfare and protection should be returned to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.”

SNAICC’s response to the discussion paper is briefly summarised below (the full response is available at www.snaicc.asn.au) and argues for a gradual transfer of responsibility for child protection decision making from centralised government child welfare departments to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations.

Unquestionably over the past twenty-five years there has been significant improvement in child welfare policy and practice. De-institutionalisation and the acceptance of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle have created opportunities for children at risk to be cared for in family based placements. Retaining connections with the family and culture of an Indigenous child in care is now more possible and more likely to occur.

Yet despite the progress Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remain

more vulnerable than any other Australian children to abuse, neglect, family poverty, poor health, homelessness, institutional racism and inadequate education. Despite the progress up to one third of Indigenous children removed from family are moved into non-Indigenous care placements that disconnect them from their culture and identity. All too often out-of-home care placements are poorly planned, with placement decision making divorced from the family and kinship networks that could provide stable and culturally safe alternative care. Emergency placements become protracted and long-term and fail to provide the cultural, material and emotional support that children need for their long-term healthy development.

Central to the claims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities since the early part of the twentieth century has been that decision making in matters pertaining to child welfare and protection should be returned to communities. SNAICC believes that the closer the authority for decision making is to the family and children about whom decisions are being made the better the outcomes for child and family.

Evidence from the international literature supports approaches to Indigenous child welfare and protection that promote self determination, family and community-level decision making, independent monitoring of child protection



Photo by Tatiana Doroshenko © SNAICC 2008

and out-of-home care standards, holistic service responses focusing at the family and community level (not the individual child level), strengths based approaches that build on and extend family capacity and responsibility for children’s well-being and healing programs based on local Indigenous cultural practices.

The government’s discussion paper is right to identify the numbers of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect as unacceptable and alarming. This is particularly true for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who are over five times more likely to be the subject of a substantiation and eight times more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. The discussion paper highlights that outcomes for children removed from their families and placed in out-of-home care are poor. These children have poorer health outcomes over the course of their lives, have lower levels of education and employment, face increased risks of homelessness and mental illness and are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system.

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This year SNAICC celebrates 25 years of advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

As part of our anniversary celebrations, in each newsletter edition this year we will bring you a story recalling an aspect of SNAICC’s history and our many campaigns.

We want to hear your story

Do you have a story of your experiences with SNAICC, or your service’s involvement with our organisation, over the last 25 years? Do you have SNAICC posters, publications, or other memorabilia to share with your story? If your story is published in our newsletter, we will give you a copy of *The Dreaming: Springboard to Learning* DVD and education resource featured in our previous edition. A limited number is available.

**Contact Mark at SNAICC to share your stories and material:
telephone (03) 9489 8099 or email: publications@snaicc.asn.au**

SNAICC Update

National Indigenous Representative Body

On 12 July the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, released an issues paper outlining key considerations in the development of a new National Indigenous Representative Body. As outlined on the HREOC website the issues paper covers three questions:

1. What lessons can be learned from mechanisms for representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the national, state/territory or regional level that have previously existed or that are currently in place?
2. What lessons can be learned from mechanisms for representing Indigenous peoples that have been established in other countries?
3. What options are there for ensuring that a National Indigenous Representative Body is sustainable?

The issues paper does not recommend a particular model but identifies the key issues to consider in developing a new national body and includes information on models and systems of representation operating in other countries. The issues paper and a summary can be found on the HREOC website:

www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/rebody/index.html

Jenny Macklin, MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has indicated that consultations on a new National Indigenous Representative Body will be carried out by the Australian Government with details on this process on their website at:

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/IndigenousRepBody>

The SNAICC National Executive discussed the issue of a new national body at their March meeting and agreed and affirmed its support for a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory body with the following elements:

- balanced representation of:
 - Aboriginal diversity and Torres Strait Islander diversity
 - states and territories

- gender
- age groups including Elders and young people
- representation from existing community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service peaks and national NGO's
- remote, rural and urban communities
- role and functions focused on:
 - policy development and advocacy to government (not program delivery)
 - establishing performance benchmarks and targets relating to the well being of children and families
 - monitoring performance of government programs and services;
- capacity to consult and liaise with communities and existing organisations to develop its policy views and 'set the agenda' for governments.

SNAICC will be making formal submissions and representations to the Federal Government in relation to a new national body.

Review of the NT Emergency Response

Another review to which SNAICC will be making a submission is the review of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. The review will be carried out by a board of three people chaired by Peter Yu, the former director of the Kimberley Land Council, Marcia Ella Duncan, Aboriginal leader and former Chair of the NSW Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, and Bill Gray AM.

The terms of reference include to:

1. examine evidence and assess the overall progress of the NTER in improving the safety and wellbeing of children and laying the basis for a sustainable and better future for residents of remote communities in the Northern Territory (NT);
2. consider what is and isn't working and whether the current suite of NTER measures will deliver the intended results, whether any unintended consequences have emerged and whether other measures should be developed; and

3. in relation to each NTER measure, make an assessment of its effects to date, and recommend any required changes to improve each measure and monitor performance.

The review board will be assisted and advised by an eleven member advisory committee and will report by the end of September. More details at:

<http://www.facs.gov.au/nter/media.htm>

SNAICC will focus its submission to the review on the development of effective child protection systems for the Northern Territory. Issues relating to child protection precipitated the NT intervention; however, despite the intervention, the task of developing new and better ways to protect children at risk of abuse or neglect has not received the attention it warrants.

SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) Update

As reported in March the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) was established by SNAICC with funding provided over the past four years by the federal government through their Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. SNAICC has sought ongoing funding for the SRS to continue its valuable work of supporting local services that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

The external evaluation of the SRS has supported a continuing role for the SRS for at least a further six years with increased focus on project implementation support, providing a clearinghouse function to local services and supporting the development and publication of local resource materials for use in children's services.

SNAICC is hopeful that ongoing funding for the SRS will be finalised with FaHCSIA and Minister Jenny Macklin very soon.

Release of new SRS resource publications

SNAICC has finalised and is now distributing a number of new resource publications funded as part of the SNAICC Resource Service. For information about any of these resource materials contact SNAICC or view them online. Most of the resources listed below can be ordered directly through the SNAICC website.



SNAICC Update

Through Young Black Eyes – 2007 Handbook, Community Leaders Guide and Family Safety leaflet

Revised and updated editions of the *Through Young Black Eyes* publications have been distributed (free of charge) to a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations across all states and territories. Additional copies are available to order and purchase online through the SNAICC website or by contacting the SNAICC office.

Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit (coming soon)

To assist local services run workshops or community forums on prevention of child abuse, child neglect and family violence, SNAICC has developed a *Workshop Kit* that includes a Facilitators Guide, activity sheets for workshops and PowerPoint presentations.

It also includes resources from other organisations, including NAPCAN's 'Children are Sacred' poster and a 20 minute film produced by RAATSIC about the effects on children of witnessing family violence. SNAICC will release and distribute the *Workshops Kit* in the coming months.

Foster Their Culture – Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out-of-home Care

This handbook has been produced to support non-Indigenous people caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care to foster and promote enduring connections between children and their family, community and culture. The handbook is being distributed to carers with assistance from state and territory foster carer associations and networks. More information about the handbook is available from SNAICC.

Connecting Communities – the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services Directory

Connecting Communities contains contact details of Indigenous family and children's services, health and legal services, government departments, peak bodies and resources agencies from across the country.

You can use the directory to look up services that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in your local area and you can add or update the details of your own service – online on through the form enclosed in the book.

Free copies of the service directory are

Julian Pocock celebrates 10 years at SNAICC



From left: Muriel Bamblett, Garry Mathews, Donna Klein, Julian Pocock and Debbie Bond.

“Julian has been SNAICC's Executive Officer for ten years,” said SNAICC Chair Muriel Bamblett at the recent July SNAICC National Executive meeting. The Executive held a morning tea for Julian to celebrate the occasion.

“The SNAICC Executive thanks him for his work and leading SNAICC from strength to strength. I want to thank him for his dedication and expertise, and also thank his family, who have supported him through all his time away from home.”

Executive members Donna Klein, from Central Queensland AICCA, and Garry Mathews, from Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Family Community Care

Centre, also spoke of the skill with which Julian had helped their services over the years.

So much praise required some moderation, so Debbie Bond, from SA Aboriginal Resource Management & Support Unit, pointed out that Julian's choice of football team – Collingwood – puts some of his ideas into question.

Julian in turn said that it is his honour to work on Aboriginal Land and he tries to do so with humility and respect. He promised he would stay on until at least the end of the executive meeting.

The chocolate mud cake was enjoyed by all.

Photo and story by Rosie Elliot

being provided to local Indigenous services across Australia, other organisations can purchase hard copies through the SNAICC website or you can access the full service directory online database at:

<http://services.snaicc.asn.au/>

National Child Protection Framework

As outlined in detail in this edition of SNAICC News, the Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin, MP, released a discussion paper proposing the development of a national child protection framework.

SNAICC has provided a written response to the discussion paper and is part of an eleven member community sector working group from the broad coalition of over fifty community sector organisations that first proposed a national response to child protection. That working group will be meeting with government representatives to continue work on the framework.

Farewell Veronica Johns – SRS Program Manager



© Mark Lawrence 2008

In June this year Veronica Johns (VJ) resigned from SNAICC to return to family and friends in Darwin after two years working for SNAICC. Veronica started as a Project Officer with SNAICC and was promoted to the position of SNAICC Resource Service Manager. We already miss her but retain the legacy of the the great work she did whilst she was here which has laid a foundation for the SRS to go from strength to strength.

By Julian Pocock, SNAICC Executive Officer

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families: Nurturing Our Children to Flourish

This the theme for the **2008 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day** (NAICD). The message is that on 4 August and everyday, we can and should care for, attend to, cherish, support and encourage our children to grow, thrive and prosper.

By **Angelique Davis, NAICD Project Officer**

'Nurturing our children to Flourish' – is it planting a seed in a young mind with the knowledge and wisdom that we are peoples from The Dreaming, with a timeless connection to family and land? Is it harnessing that knowledge, wisdom and understanding by telling stories to our kids about us, our culture and their culture? Is it allowing children the opportunity to enjoy, learn, laugh, experiment, and express themselves in safe and loving environments?

'Nurturing our children to Flourish' – is it taking up the responsibility in helping or getting help to have the best influence on our children and young people by being a good strong role model and encouraging healthy life choices? Is it providing opportunities within the arena of sports, music, education, the arts and other creative pursuits to develop a healthy identity?

Is it doing the everyday things, doing the 'basics' like making sure the kids have good food? Is it just by being there as a family and spending time with our children and letting them know that they are each loved, needed and valued?

Is it giving confidence and reward for small achievements that support their realisation of dreams and aspirations? Is it involvement in other family and community gatherings to offer further growth,

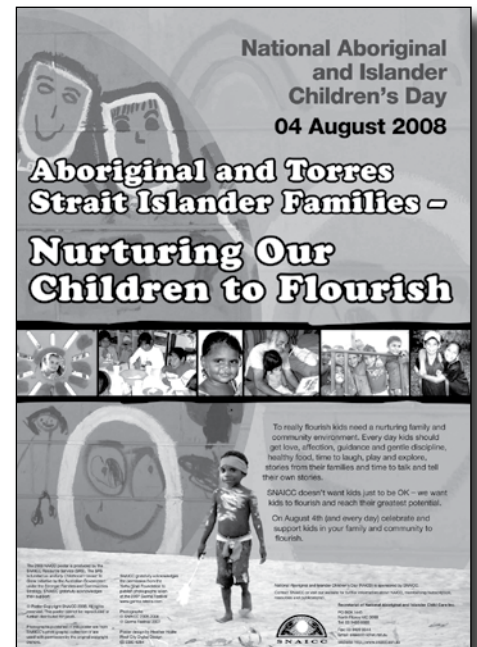
development and a sense of belonging?

We all can provide positive experiences that enrich the lives and identities of our children and young people. SNAICC doesn't want children to just be okay and do okay; we want them to flourish and achieve their greatest potential.

“SNAICC doesn't want children to just be okay and do okay; we want them to flourish and achieve their greatest potential.”

SNAICC wants you to explore what 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families – Nourish Our Children to Flourish' means to you. In your local community or service, organise a community get-together on or around Monday 4 August and celebrate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in your local community.

We also want to assist in promoting your local event, activity or celebration. We have produced promotional material such as a poster, a leaflet, stickers and an Activity Kit, which can be used throughout your service, school and/or program. This year



Above: The 2008 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day poster © SNAICC 2008. Below: photographs featured in this year's poster and other NAICD material © SNAICC 2008 or used under license

the Activity Kit comprises over 30 activities and includes 'The Dreaming DVD' which is a compilation of 13 animated Dreaming stories. The Activity Kit is a valuable resource and the activities are to share, inspire and educate.

SNAICC wants to showcase the good practices and programs in your local community that are working towards achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. The SNAICC website is a valuable tool for networking, sharing information about programs, new initiatives and products that can and are making a difference in the lives of our children and families. So write to us (or provide details on our evaluation form), email us or telephone us – We would love to publish your good news story!

If you would like further information about NAICD 2008, how to register your NAICD event or order NAICD resources online, visit the SNAICC website:

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au>

Or feel free to contact me at SNAICC on (03) 9489 8099; or email snaicc@vicnet.net.au ●



EDITORIAL

Building a National Child Protection Framework

Compounding the situation, when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is removed to a non-Indigenous care placement, that placement disconnects them from their Indigenous family, community, country and identity.

This is why support for the proper implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is so important. SNAICC notes that the discussion paper refers to an inadequate number of Indigenous carers as the key problem to address in improving compliance with the principle. Our view is that there are adequate numbers of willing carers but that the level of carer support needs to be increased to make the provision of care viable for the many families who are willing to act as carers but are themselves already living in poverty.

SNAICC also holds concerns for the families left behind when a child is removed. The child's siblings, parents, friends and kin are all likely to be traumatised by child protection interventions. Most often, in fact in two thirds of cases involving the removal of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children, child neglect is the reason for intervention. It is highly likely that the family traumatised by child removal is a poor family struggling to raise children with inadequate resources at their disposal. It is also the case that once one child has been removed the likelihood of other children in the family being removed increases. The National Child Protection Framework should prioritise support for families that have already had children removed with a view to promoting family stability, reunification and preventing subsequent child removals.

Australia's children: safe and well contains a number of reform options and details of existing government measures such as the

“It is highly likely that the family traumatised by child removal is a poor family struggling to raise children with inadequate resources at their disposal.”

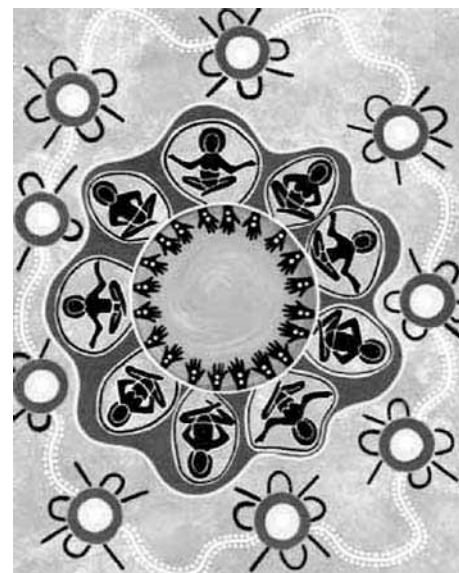
various models of income management, or welfare quarantining, developed over the past 12 months by successive federal governments.

SNAICC opposes community-wide income management as has been implemented within proscribed communities in the Northern Territory. We have seen no evidence presented that community-wide or compulsory income management arrangements applied to individual families improve the long term well-being of families and children. In relation to the recently announced income management pilots in Western Australia SNAICC has serious reservations about the capacity of child protection workers to make appropriate decisions about which – and in what circumstances – families will be forced into income management.

SNAICC does not oppose families having access to **voluntary** income management arrangements aimed at supporting families to manage their income support and improve the health and well-being of their children. Voluntary arrangements negotiated between families and child protection agencies, where families have access to other forms of family support, are in our view more likely to produce sustainable improvements in parenting, parents' self-esteem and children's well-being. However, blanket removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents' control over, and responsibility for, their household finances sends them – and their children – the message that they are not trusted to be capable of, or responsible for, parenting their children.

As some Aboriginal commentators have pointed out, income quarantining has disturbing parallels to the era when mission managers controlled what Aboriginal people under their administration could or could not do – down to their household and family arrangements.

This current situation risks creating another generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose parenting skills and abilities are seriously undermined, and whose children grow up believing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot parent without the day-to-day involvement of the state. The harm to the



Painting by Joanne Honeyset commissioned by SNAICC for the 2003 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day poster. The painting told the story of the theme, 'Not Now – Not Then – Not Ever: No Excuses, Speak Up Against Child Abuse'. © SNAICC 2003

“Income quarantining has disturbing parallels to the era when mission managers controlled what Aboriginal people under their administration could or could not do – down to their household and family arrangements.”

emotional health of children of damaging their parents' or carers' confidence and self-esteem may offset any short improvements in the physical well-being of children. These considerations have been absent from decisions to proceed with compulsory income management.

Absent also from the discussion paper and broader public debates on income management has been any assessment of the adequacy or levels of the income being managed. Families having their income managed are families living in poverty. SNAICC believes that the more critical issue to examine is the adequacy or otherwise of income support and the models or forms of support that can be provided to families and children living in poverty. Income management or welfare quarantining has no exit strategy for families in poverty – just a demoralising holding pattern.

For the national framework to make a significant difference to the safety and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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EDITORIAL

Building a National Child Protection Framework

Islander children it must deliver on five things:

1. Support self-determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander shared jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare and protection. To make a sustainable long-term impact the national framework must secure an inescapable commitment from state and territory governments to transfer decision making and resources in relation to child welfare and protection to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based organisations. This transfer of decision making and resources needs to be timetabled, preferably in national framework legislation, and supported by generalist (mainstream), non-government service providers as they currently manage the greatest proportion of placements for Indigenous children.

2. Negotiate an agreed set of principles. The framework must include a broad set of principles agreed to by and between SNAICC, the federal government and all state and territory governments that will underpin a unified approach to child welfare and protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. SNAICC has developed a set of principles for inclusion in the framework.

3. Create national outcome measures, indicators and targets, as well as monitoring and planning. It must put in place a set of outcome measures relating to the well-being of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who have had some level of involvement with the statutory child protection system. These outcomes must be linked to performance indicators and targets that are measurable, feed into a trilateral planning mechanism with



authority to direct new investments, and be independently monitored.

4. Leverage significant new investment. It must result in a significant increase in federal government investment in primary prevention and secondary support services and secure from each state and territory government a set of legislative, policy and funding commitments linked to the framework's implementation.

5. Transform the role of mainstream service providers. The role of mainstream service providers in supporting the welfare, care and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remains confused, poorly planned, misunderstood within many of those services and contentious with and within of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations. This is in part a legacy of the Stolen Generations and an outcome of purchase-provider tendering arrangements that have not favoured or supported the development of Indigenous program models and service delivery. The role of mainstream service providers needs to be transformed from service competitors to service partners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services within a framework of cultural respect.

SNAICC cannot fully endorse a national framework that fails to deliver the above commitments. Through the coalition of organisations and our own independent advocacy, SNAICC will continue to argue for the framework to include the five elements outlined above. Updates on the development of the framework will be available in future editions of *SNAICC News* and through the SNAICC website.

**By Julian Pocock,
SNAICC Executive Officer**

Available September 2008

Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit

A kit to help run workshops about:

- Family violence and its effect on children
- Child abuse and neglect
- Child sexual abuse
- Creating a child-safe community

This kit contains:

- Facilitators Guide
- Activity and information sheets
- Short films
- An CD version of all the above information – put the CD into your computer and adapt it to suit your needs.

The Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit will help you run workshops where people can share information and stories to move forward and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children be safe and happy.

Use the kit to help others make their own commitment towards creating a child-safe community!

Visit the SNAICC website to find out more and for information on how to order:
<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/publications>

Orders and inquiries are being accepted from September 2008.



Some of the males gathered at the forum who signed the statement. Photo courtesy of Central Australian Aboriginal Congress

Aboriginal men apologise to women

By Colin Cowell, Communications Manager, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress

Over 400 Aboriginal males from across Australia have issued an historic apology to their women for the “pain, hurt and suffering” Aboriginal men have caused them.

For three days in the desert of Central Australia, men of all ages from the Centre, Cape York, the Top End, New South Wales and Western Australia have discussed ways to be better fathers, husbands and sons in a series of eight workshops.

They also sought to repair the damage caused in the 12 months since their communities were denounced as hotbeds of violence and abuse.

John Liddle, from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, said that since the federal intervention to combat child sex abuse was launched in June last year, Aboriginal men had been painted as brutal and uncaring.

But he conceded good men had sat in silence, and in July this year they issued a collective apology. This apology grew out of two days of workshops and, after many hours of input and debate, the final wording brought “tears and cheers” when the apology was unanimously accepted by all the males present.

The males then showed their commitment by spontaneously lining up and actually signing the statement, which says:

“We the Aboriginal males from Central Australia and our visitor brothers from

around Australia gathered at Inteyerrkwe in July 2008 to develop strategies to ensure our future roles as husbands, grandfathers, fathers, uncles, nephews, brothers, grandsons, and sons in caring for our children in a safe family environment that will lead to a happier, longer life that reflects opportunities experienced by the wider community.

“We acknowledge and say sorry for the hurt, pain and suffering caused by Aboriginal males to our wives, to our children, to our mothers, to our grandmothers, to our granddaughters, to our aunties, to our nieces and to our sisters.

“We also acknowledge that we need the love and support of our Aboriginal women to help us move forward.”

One of the authors of the report that sparked the Howard government’s emergency response, Rex Wild QC, said the apology was “very powerful and very moving”.

He said child abuse was not just an Aboriginal problem and it had been unfair of governments to single them out.

“They are not acknowledging there is a higher rate, they are acknowledging there is a rate, that there is a level of domestic violence that they have now said sorry for,” he said.

For full details of the summit see: www.caac.org.au/malehealthinfo

Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc>

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On the website you will find a range of publications that review the latest research and practice knowledge on a number of topics related to families and relationships. Links to resources, bibliographies and conferences are also available, as well as a collection of Family Relationships Practice Profiles to gather ideas for new and innovative projects or service delivery. Consider submitting your own practice profile to share with other service providers and practitioners.

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THEME EDITORIAL

Putting children's health squarely on the agenda

It may be a truism, but it never ceases to be amazing how from little things, big things grow. From a campaign that first came to prominence around the 2007 budget with the demand that the (former) federal government increase the level of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health by \$460 million per year ongoing, the Close the Gap Campaign has come to be seen as a key to the seismic shift in public and health policy initiatives concerning the health and well-being needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Through the campaign, the Australian community had a rude awakening to the fact that the 'gap' in Indigenous health refers to the massive gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the Australian community. As Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH) CEO Mick Gooda points out, "the life expectancy for an Aboriginal Australian born today is 17 years less on average than that of a non-Aboriginal Australian born at the same time, on the same day, in the same hospital."

It was also a rude awakening for the general public to realise that Australia is behind the efforts of the United States, Canada and New Zealand in closing the gap in life expectancy between their Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

"Too many of our children are hungry, have little access to healthy food choices, and are suffering ill-health as a result."

The former Howard government did not allocate the necessary \$460 million in last year's budget to meet the shortfall in spending on Indigenous health, but the words 'Close the Gap' came to be on the lips of every politician who wanted to be taken seriously on Indigenous affairs. In particular, under then Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, the ALP officially endorsed the pledge to Close the Gap before the election.

Since winning government, Mr Rudd has repeatedly identified 'Closing the Gap' as a key priority for this government,

including in his speech in parliament when making the national apology to the Stolen Generations. In particular, the new Labor government has identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as its focus in closing the gap. They have promised to halve the mortality rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within ten years, to improve literacy and numeracy rates, and to increase access to preschool programs.

SNAICC welcomes the government's emphasis on children. From the various contributions to this **Special Theme on Health and Nutrition**, we can see that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's health and well-being needs are great.

The special feature article on Indigenous nutrition in early childhood points out that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – whether in remote, regional or urban communities – face food insecurity, nutrition related illnesses, and food poverty. To be blunt, too many of our children are hungry, have little access to healthy food choices, and are suffering ill-health as a result.

In light of this, the government's renewed emphasis on Indigenous health is welcomed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, the Close the Gap Campaign coalition, and the wider community. But it is worth noting, as NACCHO's article for our special theme points out, that various plans, strategies, frameworks and initiatives to improve Indigenous health have come before, and have failed where governments have not been committed enough, or allocated sufficient funds, to the desired results: the improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.



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The CRCAH's Research Director, Professor Ian Anderson, said recently, "Despite this ongoing health gap, there is increasing evidence nationally and internationally that suggests positive health outcomes for Aboriginal people are being achieved when Aboriginal peoples have decisive input into the design and delivery of health services."

What is clear is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are already doing so much to improve their children's health. This is evident from the various examples of early years nutrition initiatives and health and well-being programs presented in this edition.

It is also clear that holistic approaches to health and well-being developed and delivered by holistic community-controlled Aboriginal organisations do work. But it is not only the case in the early childhood setting. As seen in the example in this edition, holistic Aboriginal child and family welfare agencies working *with* parents can assist them to raise their children strong and healthy, and so support these parents to keep their children *safe and healthy* at home.

By no means will progress be easy. As Professor Anderson also pointed out, "Closing the Indigenous health gap provides an enormous challenge, but it also provides everyone working in Indigenous health ... with an unprecedented opportunity to make genuine, long-term positive change." ●

'Closing the Gap' in Indigenous health disadvantage

By Dea Thiele, CEO, and Dr Sophie Couzos, Public Health Officer, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

Dr Naomi Mayers and other representatives from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) met on 10 March 2006 at the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissions offices in Sydney to discuss the way forward following the 2005 Social Justice Report. They brought with them the mandate from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) to advocate for closing the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. For Dr Mayers, then Deputy Chair of NACCHO, this was reminiscent of the efforts of the 1989 National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Working Party.

“A renewed call for action to direct sufficient investment to close the health gap was needed.”

Dr Mayers chaired the NAHS Working Party, which produced Australia's first national strategy to close the gap in health status between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. The NAHS was a triumph of Aboriginal leadership with comprehensive inter-sectoral solutions that fostered partnership and capacity building. However, a 1994 Review found that the Strategy had been underfunded and never fully implemented.

By 2003, it was replaced by the 10-year National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (NSFATSIH), which was endorsed by all Australian Health Ministers through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) subcommittee. With it came an Implementation Plan to guide departmental efforts. The Plan was revised early in 2007, surprisingly in the absence of a review of the preceding five years.

Clearly the NSFATSIH, despite having arisen from the COAG process, did not foster the commitment needed from state, territory and federal governments and something more was needed. A renewed call for action to direct investments of a sufficient quantum to close the health gap was needed. It was to this end that NACCHO supported the Social Justice Commissioner's recommendations in 2006 and the call to action was made in a public letter of January 2006. In April 2007, the campaign was in full swing and Oxfam Australia partnered with NACCHO to produce the widely cited report *Solutions to the Indigenous Health Crisis Facing Australia*.

By December 2007, a new government had been elected and COAG committed again to a partnership between all levels of government “to work with Indigenous communities to achieve the target of ‘closing the gap’ on Indigenous disadvantage”, and agreeing to close the 17-year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation. COAG also committed to halve the mortality gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under five within a decade.

The HREOC Summit held in March 2008 culminated in the Prime Minister signing a Statement of Intent on behalf of the Government of Australia, thus:

- ensuring primary health care services and health infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ... are capable of bridging the gap in health standards by 2018;
- ensuring the full participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies in all aspects of addressing their health needs; [and]
- supporting and developing ACCHSs in urban, rural and remote areas in order to achieve lasting improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.



So, where is the action? Based on gaps in the NSFATSIH, NACCHO's Health Equality Plan provided the template for a comprehensive set of primary health care goals and targets drafted for HREOC as a product of the Summit. Amongst them is the need to:

- Establish a national framework agreement to secure the appropriate engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative bodies in the design and delivery of accessible, culturally appropriate and quality primary health care services,
- Fund a 5-year Capacity Building Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services (including governance, capital works and recurrent support) to provide comprehensive primary health care to an accredited standard and to meet the level of need.

The achievement of this goal requires additional grants to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services of \$150 million, \$250 million, \$350 million, \$400 million, and \$500 million per annum over five years, with the \$500 million sustained in real terms thereafter until the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health gap closes.

“The recent Federal Budget did not deliver the funds necessary for Aboriginal health services to bridge the gap in health standards.”

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Setting targets: holding governments responsible on Closing the Gap

By Laurelle Keough, Advocacy & Campaigns, Oxfam Australia

On Tuesday 28 July, the Close the Gap coalition presented the federal government and Opposition with a set of National Indigenous Health Equality Targets to address the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said, "The targets are specific, time-bound commitments that will keep us on track to achieve the Close the Gap goals."

"For a long time, we've known how to improve Aboriginal health. We're now confident that there is a national commitment from all sides of politics to work in partnership with Aboriginal people to close the gap within our lifetimes," Commissioner Calma said.

The Close the Gap campaign calls on federal, state and territory governments to commit to closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a

generation. The campaign is a coalition of more than 40 Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations. More than 120,000 Australians have pledged their support to Close the Gap.

The campaign has been hugely successful, with governments at all levels coming on board. In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership of all levels of government to work with Indigenous communities to achieve the targets of closing the 17-year life expectancy gap within a generation and halving the mortality rate of Indigenous children within ten years. This was the first time Australian governments had agreed to be accountable for reaching this goal by placing its achievement within a timeframe.

The campaign culminated in the National Indigenous Health Equality Summit in Canberra in March 2008, where Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson and



'Close the Gap' poster image courtesy of Oxfam Australia © Oxfam Australia

leaders of Indigenous health peak bodies and mainstream health bodies signed a historic Close the Gap Statement of Intent.

This included an agreement to ensure that primary health care services and health infrastructure for Indigenous Australians were capable of bridging the gap in health standards by 2018.

July's National Indigenous Health Equality Targets is another step in making governments accountable on Closing the Gap. However, there is much more to be done, and all of us need to keep governments on target.

Go to www.closethegap.com.au to find out how you can help support the campaign demanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality. ●

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Closing the Gap in Indigenous health disadvantage

The proposed expenditure provides for staff salaries (doctors, nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers, and allied health, dental, administrative/management and support staff) including training, transport provision, and ancillary programs and all other operational costs, including the annualised cost of infrastructure. This also includes housing for staff in remote areas.

To this day, we have yet to see an agreement between NACCHO and the Department of Health and Ageing to support collaboration with Aboriginal-elected leaders in policy and program development and evaluation, and the recent Federal Budget did not deliver the quantum of funds necessary for Aboriginal

health services to bridge the gap in health standards.

These two issues continue to undermine the decades of effort to achieve health equality by Aboriginal representative bodies such as NACCHO and remain inconsistent with the obligations inherent in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to health. When the next round of COAG commitments is released, Aboriginal health leaders may well cry "here we go again".

The references for this article are available on the SNAICC website. See the 'Newsletters' page of the 'SNAICC Publications' section of our website: <http://www.snaicc.asn.au/publications>

NACCHO is Australia's national peak body representing the health interests of Aboriginal peoples. It is an award-winning organisation established in Albury in 1974 and represents over 140 Aboriginal community-controlled health services (ACCHSs) around Australia.

The **Close the Gap campaign** is only just beginning; please continue to support our efforts by supporting NACCHO and the Oxfam Australia Campaign (see also the article above).

NACCHO:
www.naccho.org.au

Oxfam Australia Campaign:
<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/indigenous-health/>

Improving Indigenous early childhood nutrition

By Judith Myers, NATSINSAP Senior Project Officer

Following the formal apology to the Stolen Generations and their families, the federal government has committed to 'Close the Gap' in health between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through setting targets that focus on early childhood including:

- Halving the mortality gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and other children under age 5 within a decade,
- Halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students within a decade.

Good nutrition in early childhood is essential for children to reach their full developmental, learning, and health potential. Nutrition is not just about health business. In fact, a public health approach to nutrition and therefore 'best buy' for improving nutrition is through the collaborative positioning of nutrition expertise and programs within and across government and non-government sectors.

“Up to 11 per cent of children under 5 years of age in remote communities in Northern Australia have acute malnutrition (wasting).”

To have the greatest impact on child nutrition and health, strategies that improve food security, food supply in rural and remote areas, household and community infrastructure and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce need to act together. At the 'Close the Gap: Health Equity Summit' in March, the specific nutrition recommendations tabled were the inclusion of key nutrition targets focusing on early life and the subsidisation of the healthy food basket.

The recent budget committed \$4.5 million over five years for 'healthy guidelines for early childhood obesity reduction' to provide guidelines on nutrition and physical activity to assist child care services and preschools provide the high quality care children deserve. The vital role that



Cooking fresh vegetables in a wok on a flour-drum stove. Making fresh fruit and vegetables more affordable and accessible in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a key factor to improving food security and children's nutritional health. Photo courtesy of Rosie Elliot.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services provide in assisting with food security for malnourished children also needs to be considered here.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan (NATSINSAP)

The NATSINSAP 2000–2010 is a nationally agreed framework for action to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through better nutrition. NATSINSAP sets a framework for action across all levels of government, in conjunction with partners from industry and the non-government sector and has been designed to build on existing efforts to improve access to nutritious and affordable food across urban, rural and remote communities. The current priority areas for action are:

1. Maternal and child nutrition
2. Food security and food supply in remote and rural communities
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce
4. Communicating good practice

For each priority area, examples of current action and 'good news' stories follow.

1. Maternal and child nutrition

Inequity in nutrition-related outcomes between those for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and for non-Indigenous children has been observed for many decades across Australia. These discrepancies are observed at both ends of the nutrition spectrum, including low birth weight, growth failure and iron deficiency, as well as increasing reports of early childhood obesity.

The impact of poor diet can be traced from conception through to adulthood, with increasing evidence linking low birth weight and poor growth in infancy, as well as childhood overweight, to adult onset chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

Babies born to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers are currently twice as likely to have a low birth weight compared to babies born to non-Indigenous mothers. A recent report on children's growth identified that up to 11 per cent of children under 5 years of age in remote communities in Northern Australia had acute malnutrition (wasting). Wasting, or low weight for height, is a strong predictor of mortality in children under five. It is usually the result of acute significant food shortage and/or disease. According to

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Improving Indigenous early childhood nutrition

UNICEF, wasting rates of 10 per cent or more in developing countries indicate a serious problem urgently requiring a response.

An increasing prevalence of obesity in childhood represents an emerging problem in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood community. Up to 1 in 4 children in remote communities in the Torres Straits have been identified as obese, suggesting a similar prevalence to the remaining Australian childhood population. In the context of the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, obesity in childhood may be a significant problem, particularly in urban areas.

Current action and what works

Exclusive breastfeeding for six months is the best start for infants, providing all of the nutrition needed as well as offering considerable health benefits to both the infant and mother. Breastfed infants are less likely to develop respiratory illness, and some diet related chronic disease later in life. Unfortunately, the overall rates of breastfeeding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is lower than for non-Indigenous children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women living in remote areas were more likely to have

“Food poverty exists side by side with food plenty and for this reason in a rich country such as Australia the issue of hunger is often hidden.”

breastfed than those in non-remote areas.

Culturally appropriate antenatal care programs such as ‘Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture’ have been shown to reduce the incidence of low-birth weight infants in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. New initiatives such as the ‘nurse home visiting program’ may also provide opportunities to improve nutrition and health from birth.

Although early intervention or prevention of child nutrition problems remains a priority, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation states “there remains an urgent need for several Aboriginal communities to have immediate access to food supplements”. Although this may be viewed as controversial, a similar recommendation has been recently put forward at a recent National Nutrition Networks Conference: “Implement the provision of nutrition



© SNAICC 2008

food to supplement at risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, babies and children according to local need through existing programs.”

The challenge is to provide enough nutrition for this current generation of babies and young children whilst engaging parents and mobilising community members to develop holistic, coordinated, family-centred approaches to improving nutrition.

2. Food security

Access to food is essential to attain an adequate standard of living for health and well-being and has been identified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed off in 1948 by the United Nations. Food poverty exists side by side with food plenty and for this reason in a rich country such as Australia the issue of hunger is often hidden.

Both over nutrition and under nutrition can be linked to food poverty. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, whether living in urban, rural or remote settings, the availability and cost of healthy nutritious food is a basic public health issue.

In remote areas, stores and takeaways are estimated to provide around 90–95 per cent of all food that is consumed in the community. Store food tends to be expensive and offers a limited range of healthy choices, particularly so for perishable items such as fruit and vegetables.

The capacity for food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is undermined by food access (e.g. low income), food availability (high food costs and limited availability of nutritious foods) and food use (e.g. inadequate household infrastructure).

Current action and what works

RIST project: A current national initiative to address food supply issues is the national

Wok cooking on a flour drum stove

Health nutrition initiatives that assist communities to develop skills in both creating the necessary household infrastructure for food use, and in how to prepare and cook fresh food, especially vegetables, enable community members to improve their diets and nutrition.

Practical and inventive ideas are cheap and work the best.

One initiative in the NT involved showing communities how to build a simple campfire stove out of a metal flour drum and encouraging cooking with a wok. Cooking fresh vegetables quickly in a wok helps to retain their nutrients, colour and flavour.

Developed by Roy Price, an NT-based public health nutritionist, the flour drum stove is an award winning initiative.

For more information on the flour drum stove, including the ‘How To’ book, see:

www.ethicalnutrition.com.au/Flour-Drum_Stove.htm

From a contribution by Roy Price to *Kids Tracks*, Issue 3, July-August 2005.



Cooking up plenty of vegetables in a wok on a flour drum stove. Photo courtesy of Kids Tracks



Continued...

Remote Indigenous Stores and Take-away Project (RIST), which has developed and piloted a suite of tools designed to support the supply, promotion and sale of healthy food and drinks in remote stores and take-aways.

The project builds on other initiatives to establish and improve standards for 'healthy' remote stores. These resources are now available on the Indigenous HealthInfoNet site and will be implemented on a state-by-state basis within nutrition programs:

http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_community/nutrition_community/resources/nutrition_health_promotion_resources.htm#rist

Another example of a success story is the **Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy** whose goal is to improve the health and well-being of Anangu living in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands by ensuring continuous access for them to nutritious and affordable food and essential health items.

The Mai Wiru Stores Policy recognises the complexity and interrelatedness of store operations in remote communities and the factors that affect the ability of community members to buy, store and prepare food. These include: food supply, food security, food availability and food affordability, food safety and hygiene, nutrition awareness and health promotion (including display systems), employment and training, fair trading, management and accountability, infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation and the public display of the policy. (See the related article on page 17 in this issue.)

Other national initiatives addressing food supply include the Outback Stores initiative of IBA, which aims to provide a retail management service for sustainable and 'healthy' remote community stores across Australia, and the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) 'FOOD card' system.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce

Having a well supported, funded and educated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce is essential to attaining food security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Food and nutrition training has recently been integrated into Aboriginal Health Worker primary health care qualifications.

And, encouragingly, the nutrition unit 'CHCCN3C Prepare nutritionally balanced food in a safe and hygienic manner' will now be a compulsory unit of competence in the Community Services Training package CHC02.

With the current focus by COAG on early childhood health and education, it is timely to advocate for greater focus on nutrition and strategies to address food security in the early years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Child care centres and Indigenous playgroups are key settings to promote not only access to nutrition foods, but opportunities for skill development and learning for staff, caregivers and children. (See the article, 'Bush Babies', on page 17 in this issue.)

4. Communicating good practice

There are new opportunities to better support a more collaborative approach to addressing food and nutrition issues within the early childhood sector through the exchange and dissemination of information.

Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet
www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au
www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/nutrition

The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet is a widely recognised internet resource on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

A new nutrition section has been added recently to provide a valuable range of up-to-date information, knowledge, relevant policies and resources needed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition-focused workforce often working in isolation. This site provides anyone interested in nutrition the opportunity to search for information and/or join an online 'Yarning Place' to enable discussion across differed parts of the country. The site provides a great opportunity to share examples of good news nutrition stories among child care services.

National Nutrition Networks Conference 2008

This conference was held in Alice Springs in March and was a great success with around 200 participants and presentations from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenters from across Australia. Tom Calma, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Social Justice Commissioner set the scene by providing an inspiring address on a human rights-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and nutrition.

Recommendations arising from the Conference now inform the ongoing work from the NATSINSAP, Close the Gap and other bodies and forums. Some of these recommendations from the conference include:

- The provision of nutritious food to supplement at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, babies and children according to local need through existing programs (e.g. maternal and child health and nurse home visiting programs)
- National breakfast and lunch initiatives to be funded based on local need and community involvement and participation, e.g. through women's centres, child care centres, preschools and schools
- The creation and ongoing support of dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition positions prioritising early life, linked with pre-existing and new programs
- Research, including an economic analysis, to identify effective strategies of applying subsidies to achieve equity in the costs and availability of basic foods, including fresh fruit and vegetables, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Subsidies for infrastructure and transport (particularly for communities with small populations) and food household infrastructure (including appropriate food storage, preparation and cooking facilities)
- Collaboration across all sectors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and child development to address holistic approaches that recognise good nutrition as a necessary component of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health improvement.

For more information about any of the NATSINSAP initiatives, please contact:

Judith Myers, Senior Project Officer
 NATSINSAP
 Tel: (03) 9321 1529 or
 email: Judith.myers@heartfoundation.org.au



The KARI Clinic – Identifying and Responding to the Needs of Indigenous Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC)

By Sandra Reynolds, Psychologist, KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc.

The KARI Clinic is an exciting and innovative service offered by KARI Aboriginal Resources Incorporated (KARI) to the children and young within its out-of-home care (OOHC) program. The purpose of the Clinic is to identify the developmental and health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as they enter the service's OOHC program.

This is achieved through a multidisciplinary, culturally appropriate team of allied health staff performing developmental screening, behavioural assessments, speech and occupational therapy assessments and further referrals to specialists/therapists if required.

The Clinic is an ongoing program operating under the voluntary support, goodwill and resources of an intersectoral/multidisciplinary partnership between KARI, South West Sydney Area Health Service (SWSAHS) and the New South Wales Department of Community Services (DoCS) Metro South West Sydney Region.

The Clinic was initially developed due to an observation that many of those entering the service's OOHC program were experiencing multiple developmental and health issues. The concept was largely the brainchild of the KARI Chief Executive Officer, Paul Ralph. As the need for a comprehensive service was recognised, initial meetings and workshops were held between staff and some members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in 2002.

It was then identified that we were dealing with a particularly vulnerable group of children and young people with high level health and psychological needs. It was also highlighted that these needs were currently unrecognised and unmet at the time of entering OOHC. The 'Clinic' concept was then presented to two major agency partners, SWSAH and DoCS. After numerous meetings deciding on how the Clinic management would be suitable to all

partners, it officially commenced operation in 2003.

Since its inception, the KARI Clinic has collected and evaluated relevant data relating to the needs and progress of clients entering the KARI OOHC Program. A formal presentation was made on the findings at the Australian Conference of Child Abuse and Neglect in November 2007. The results showed that 53 per cent of children had overdue immunisation status, 43 per cent had hearing problems, 44 per cent had visual concerns, 38 per cent had dental problems, 61 per cent had speech delays (one fifth of these were in the moderate to severe category), 34 per cent had fine motor problems, 46 per cent had behavioural problems (externalising and internalising), 66 per cent of children had education problems and 30 per cent of children had global developmental delays.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care in the South West Sydney region present with many health and developmental issues.”

The observations were clear in that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entering care in the South West Sydney region present with many health and developmental issues. But on the positive side, we also found that 14 per cent of children were doing well at their first visit to the clinic! And a further 34 per cent of children showed improvement after being placed in a stable foster care environment. It is much more difficult to measure strengths than it is weaknesses; however, it was found that the kids who were doing well at their first visit and improved after review had a positive



Dr Anne Piper (paediatrician), Dr Shanti Raman (paediatrician) & Sandra Reynolds (psychologist) presenting at the Australian Conference of Child Abuse and Neglect. Photo courtesy of KARI © KARI

outlook, pleasing temperament and were good at engaging/recruiting adults to care for them.

The Clinic continues to evolve, increasing its capacity and services offered. It is one of only four such Clinics within New South Wales that offers this specialised service. The vision of the KARI Clinic is to one day be able to service all vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people within the South West Sydney area.

Research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is so important and there is a real need for agencies to commit to carrying out research so that we can advance and obtain better outcomes for children and communities. We now aim to research and deliver findings in a research paper and submit to a journal late this year. So watch this space! ●



Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy

The primary aim of this store policy is to improve the health and well-being of people on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, located in the north west of South Australia, by ensuring continuous access for them to nutritious and affordable food and essential health items. Mai Wiru is a community-based initiative and implementation began in 2005.

Developing positive eating habits in the very young is a crucial aspect of Mai Wiru. The policy achieves this by:

- Stores stocking appropriate foods for the 0-5 years age group
- Restricting sales of nutritionally poor food items through community stores
- Providing in-store cooking demonstrations on how to feed a family a nutritious meal on a limited budget
- Eliminating certain foods from store shelves that are detrimental to children's health
- Selling kids' supplementary food packs, designed by the policy nutritionist, in stores where possible.

The importance of this policy is that it provides a framework in which store managers can be advised, guided and monitored in meeting policy guidelines. It also means that store managers become accountable to their local store committee and community in ensuring that the customer can make healthy food purchases at all times.

Contributed by Rosalind Butler

Public Health Nutritionist,
Nganampa Health Council
Alice Springs, NT



Bush Babies A taste of learning

By Liz MacRaid

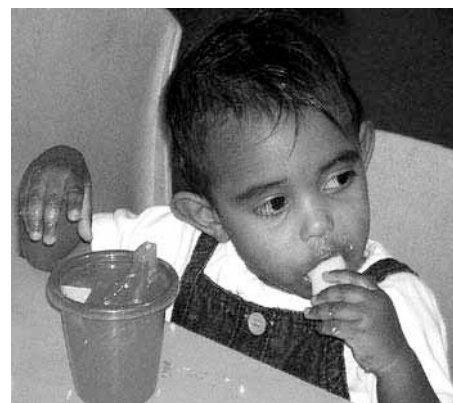
Regional Strategies Child, Youth & Family,
Department of Community Services (NSW)

A pilot project in Orange, in Central New South Wales, is working with local women to choose, prepare and serve the best food for babies and young children. A partnership between Bush Babies playgroup, TAFE NSW and the NSW Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy lead to a group of 13 Aboriginal women undertaking training in Certificate III in Children's Services in 2008.

Last year a pilot group completed three units from the qualification, including 'Preparing nutritionally balanced food in a safe and hygienic manner.' This competency covers dietary needs, food preparation, storage and disposal. It also teaches about illnesses that can result from poorly handled food.

With the help of a grant from the Adult National Literacy Program, the units were customised to include an Indigenous view of caring for children, and how family and community support each other in this. The language and literacy requirements of the training matched those needed to work in children's services as an assistant.

The course teaches skills that are useful for employment, but also in the everyday lives of women as sisters, mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Classes learn about traditional foods, lifestyle related diseases, the importance of fresh foods and how to read product labels. A visit to the supermarket and hand-on cooking sessions have been good ways to encourage yarning about food and choices.



Talara at Bush Babies playgroup with her morning tea apple. Photo courtesy of Liz MacRaid

The pilot class was recruited through Bush Babies, as the training built on other initiatives within the playgroup to give parents an understanding of what kids need at all stages as they grow. The course was organised so that mums in particular could manage it around their families, and get a taste of what TAFE is like.

Training was sometimes at TAFE in a classroom setting and also at Bush Babies where more applied skills were practised and assessed. In addition to classroom support, the project offered child care for participants, transport, lunch and the all important support of the Aboriginal Family and Community Worker, Pam Boney.

An important aim of Orange Women's Gathering, who first set up Bush Babies playgroup, is to increase attendance by Aboriginal kids at early childhood programs by having more Indigenous, trained child care workers employed in centres. The Certificate III pilot has given women confidence to apply for jobs. They are being successful, looking for other training opportunities, taking on new things and supporting each other.

For further information contact:
liz.macrauld@community.nsw.gov.au

JUST OUT

Holding Men: Kanyirninpa and the health of Aboriginal men

By Brian F McCoy

This book by Jesuit priest and medical anthropologist Brian McCoy explores how Aboriginal men of the Kimberly Western Desert understand their lives, their health and their culture.

According to the author, "we actually know little about Aboriginal men and how they perceive well-being and illness".

The book aims to remedy that lack of knowledge by using conversations, stories and art to illustrate how Kimberley communities express cultural values and relationships through a term they describe as *kanyirninpa* or holding. This key value has sustained Aboriginal desert life for centuries.

Published by Aboriginal Studies Press. Cost: \$34.95. For details go to:

www.aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal_studies_press/

Source: Media release from the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health

Making a Home

Supporting families to develop healthy child-rearing skills and behaviours

By Rebecca Kimlin, Coordinator of Community Wellbeing
Aboriginal Family Support Services

A FSS is community-driven Aboriginal child welfare agency in South Australia. Community Wellbeing works holistically with Nunga families to ensure healthy living and healthy choices occur for families growing up Aboriginal children and young people.

Community Wellbeing delivers programs to families by creating a circle of care. Aboriginal families who access our services are usually engaged in more than one service we provide. Therefore their goals for a healthy and poverty-free family are achievable as we are able to offer services that cater to their multiple and complex needs.

“Most participants are surprised how affordable, healthy and yummy the meal is, and also how fun and stress-free it was to cook with their child.”

For instance, Tina*, the mother of four children aged 2–11 years, was first introduced to Community Wellbeing by attending the Strengthening Nunga Families (SNF) parenting program. Tina is a single mother who before starting the course had escaped domestic violence and was seeking support to help her start afresh. She identified many issues with the facilitators of SNF and one of those was in regards to her finances and ability to provide healthy food and choices to her children.

The ‘Strengthening Nunga Families Parenting Program’ is a 10-week course focussed on strengthening the relationship between parent and child. We discuss many topics around Aboriginal child-rearing. Every week, the group collectively prepares an affordable healthy meal that we share for lunch. One week is dedicated to learning the practical skills needed to provide healthy

food on a budget. As a group we set a budget as well as do our own individual budgeting exercise. This assists participants to see where their money is going, and also opens discussion and sharing of ideas about how we can make our money work best for our family.

For instance, we will discuss how much we spend on takeaway food and compare this money spent to the cost of cheap, healthy alternatives. Together everyone, including children, participates in cooking a healthy lunch. We outline with the group what makes this meal healthy and how much we spent, and we discuss the benefits of everyone in the family working together. Most participants are surprised how affordable, healthy and yummy the meal is, and also how fun and stress-free it was to cook with their child. At the end of the session, recipe books are given out that outline healthy family recipes on a budget.

During the ten-week parenting course, Tina expressed that she found it difficult financially to support four children and pay off debts; one particular week she was very stressed and under pressure to provide for her children. We referred her to Community Assistance Program (CAP).

CAP offers temporary emergency relief to families who are finding it difficult with their finances. Many come to us with debt and look to us to find alternative methods to overcoming poverty. AFSS Emergency Relief was designed to prevent poverty and unhealthy living. It aims at creating self-determination for the Aboriginal community by providing families with food vouchers whereby they are able to select fresh produce (meat, fruit, vegetables, and bakery) from Adelaide Central Market.

At the end of the 10-week course, Tina made a self-referral to Strong Families as ongoing support for herself and her children. She also entered her own housing away from domestic violence shelters.

Strong Families is a family preservation and early intervention model that works intensively with families to reduce the risk

of family breakdown. Families are referred or come voluntarily to our service, usually around the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Tina’s case plan highlighted the additional assistance she needed to strengthen her parenting skills to provide a safe and happy home. Tina was then referred to Home Maker service for additional practical support in and around the home.

The Home Maker program assists families in the home with practical skills. There is a strong focus on nutrition and budgeting. Home Maker works on role-modelling skills to parents. When nutrition and budgeting is highlighted as an issue for the family, and an individual goal is set, we will work with the family on strengthening their skills in this area.

For instance, Tina finds it difficult to purchase healthy food on her low income. Through a more intensive budgeting exercise with Tina, we would then find out what her budget is and go shopping with her to select more affordable items. The home visit would end with cooking a meal together, perhaps a nutritious treat for when the children come home from school, or something the family can do together.

Most families who engage in Community Wellbeing services have similar experiences to Tina’s. They want independence and the ability to make healthier choices for themselves and their children. By offering the circle of care to Aboriginal families, we give them the opportunity to become strong.

For any enquiries about AFSS Community Wellbeing, please call (08) 83512661 or see www.afss.com.au

***Note:** names have been changed to preserve the privacy of program participants.



Photo courtesy of Undoochoo Child Care Centre, QLD © SNAICC 2007

Budget fails to deliver key promises

4500 Indigenous children still missing out on a better start in life

In response to the federal government's 2008 budget, SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett, AM said that, "after raising expectations that they would do whatever it takes to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, the government has not made the necessary commitments to early learning and child care. We need to close the gap between the pre-election promises and the progress."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those outside the Northern Territory, should feel let down by this budget. The new government has to be able to manage the Northern Territory Intervention without falling behind on other key election commitments. If it does, it risks wasting the good will generated through the recent national apology," she added.

She said, "Prior to the election Labor promised that, 'All Indigenous four-year-olds will be eligible to receive 15 hours of Government-funded early learning programs per week for a minimum of 40 weeks a year.' In the budget papers this appears to have been watered down to a commitment limited to Indigenous children

from remote communities – leaving the 75 per cent of Indigenous children who live outside remote communities out in the cold."

Ms Bamblett added, "In their pre-election policy the ALP also estimated that at least \$21 million per year was needed to provide early learning services for the 4,500 Indigenous four-year-olds that currently miss out. No specific funding let alone \$21 million was earmarked in the budget for this purpose and next year 4,500 four-year-old Indigenous children will still miss out on a better start in life."

She said, "The 2007 Coalition budget provided an extra \$37.3 million for new Indigenous child care hubs and playgroups. Before the election, Labor promised to 'build on this commitment', 'expand early learning programs into Indigenous communities' and 'introduce a comprehensive package focussing on Indigenous children's early years.' The first ALP budget contains no comprehensive package and no extra funds to build on and develop additional early learning and child care services for Indigenous families."

She added, "Contrast this with the extra \$1.6 billion over four years to increase the

child care cash rebate. Indigenous families are significantly under represented in child care, making up less than 2 per cent of families accessing child care, with many of those families not eligible to claim the cash rebate. The budget funds a massive expansion of a mainstream child care program from which little or no benefit will flow to Indigenous families – the families that have poorer access to child care than anyone else."

"The government is still relatively new but it has to do better. They need to get on with developing the promised comprehensive early years package. They can do this by ensuring that a fair proportion of all their early childhood budget measures are specifically directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These children make up 4 per cent of Australia's children and its time they got not a penny less than 4 per cent of the billions of dollars flowing into child care and early childhood funding."

From a SNAICC media statement on 14 May 2008. For more on SNAICC's comments on the federal budget, see: www.snaicc.asn.au/policy

SPECIAL FOCUS: HEALTH & NUTRITION

Find more health and nutrition resources and stories on SNAICC's Online SRS Clearinghouse

A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's health and nutrition related presentations were given at SNAICC's National Conference in Adelaide last year (September 2007).

A number of workshop presentations and keynote speeches, as well as other health related resources, have been published on on SNAICC's SRS Clearinghouse. Some of the presentations published online include:

'Growing Bush Babies – listening to community.' A description of linked up programs and activities that are helping

the community raise its kids to be strong and confident and get a good start in life; by Pam Boney (Glenroi Heights Public School) and Liz MacRaild (Child Youth & Family Department Community Services, Orange NSW)

'Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.' What we know and what we need to let others know; by Sue Miers, (National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Related Disorders SA)

'Start Right-Eat Right: Helping SA child care centres with good nutrition for children in care.' An overview of the Start Right-Eat Right (SRER) Award; by Louisa Matwiejczyk, Claire Fitzgerald (South Adelaide Health Service SA)

'Promoting awareness of nutritional risk factors contributing to chronic disease within Indigenous communities: An outreach model'; by Susan Pitman & Rachel Bonnici (Oz Child Children Australia Inc VIC)

These SNAICC Conference presentations are available on the 'Conference' page of the 'Policy and Advocacy' section of our website: <http://snaicc.asn.au/policy>

You can also find these and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and families' services related resources, including in health and nutrition, on SNAICC's SRS Clearinghouse at: <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/resourcing>



SNAICC Publications and Resources

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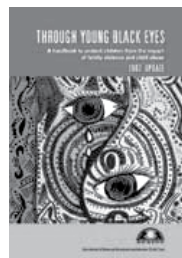
Through Young Black Eyes: Manual – 2007 edition

A fully edited and updated 2007 edition of the Manual to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities stop child abuse and family violence.

Publisher: SNAICC

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Order form available on our website



Through Young Black Eyes – Community Leaders' Guide

32 page DL full colour booklet

& Keep Your Family Safe – leaflet

Full colour leaflet

Publisher: SNAICC

Cost: free

The fully updated and edited 2007 editions of the *Through Young Black Eyes* resources to assist communities to stop child abuse and family violence can now be ordered. Produced by the SRS.

“Remember Me” – Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* Report (2007) ISBN: 978-1-921174-11-7

Publisher: SNAICC

Cost: free

SNAICC's recent publication to commemorate the tenth anniversary of *Bringing Them Home*. Order online from SNAICC's website.

Contains essays and reflections on the Inquiry and the report's impact on Australia.



NEW – NOW AVAILABLE

Foster Their Culture – Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out-of-Home Care

Publisher: SNAICC

Cost: free to foster carers, foster carer support groups, and out-of-home care services

A resource to specifically support non-Indigenous carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Assists them to keep children in care connected to their community, culture, identity and family. Foster carers can contact their foster carer association directly to get their free copy. Organisations can contact Mark Lawrence at SNAICC for details:

publications@snaicc.asn.au



Connecting Communities – The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services Directory

Publisher: SNAICC

Cost: \$35 including GST, postage and handling

A comprehensive print directory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services across Australia based on SNAICC's online Services Directory. A joint publication between Infolink Australia and SNAICC.

Available to order from the SNAICC website.



COMING SOON

Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit

Publisher: SNAICC

Cost: \$95 incl. GST, postage and handling

A kit to help run workshops about family violence and its effect on children, child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse and creating a child-safe community.

See page 8 for details.

To order or download SNAICC publications, go to:
www.snaicc.asn.au/publications