



**25** still  
Years going  
1983–2008 strong

# SNAICC NEWS

Print Post No: 320231/0100

Secretariat of National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care Newsletter

October 2008



Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin announced a \$3 million funding extension for SNAICC for the SNAICC Resource Service during the launch of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day at Yappera MACS in Thornbury, Melbourne. From left: SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett, Minister Jenny Macklin MP, and Yappera Children's Services Directory Stacey Brown. Photo © SNAICC 2008

## \$3 million funding extension from federal government for SNAICC Resource Service

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister the Hon. Jenny Macklin, MP announced a further \$3 million funding over three years for SNAICC to continue the work of the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS).

The Minister made the announcement at the launch of the 2008 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day at Yappera Children's Service in Melbourne on 4 August.

The funding, to come from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), will enable us to continue our work in supporting, resourcing and building the capacity of services.

The SRS produces resources and supports the development of Indigenous services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to grow up their children healthy, safe and strong – in other

words to flourish.

Some of the SRS's initiatives have included:

- developing and distributing parenting posters
- publishing family violence and child abuse prevention resources
- conducting capacity building projects
- supporting the development of Indigenous children's services, and
- developing a range of other information publications and resources.

In her media statement released on Children's Day, Minister Jenny Macklin said:

"Australian Government funding enables SNAICC to further strengthen support services for Indigenous children, families and communities and provide advice on services required to close the gap in Indigenous early childhood.

The funding will also assist SNAICC share information between the Government and the community on social issues, represent the rights and views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and provide information about relevant government policies and programs."

SNAICC is grateful to the Australian Government for its continuing support, through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, of our work.

By Mark Lawrence  
SNAICC Publications Officer

See also the report on the launch of Children's Day on page 8 of this edition

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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 **January** edition is **1 December 2008**.

#### For publication inquiries contact:

Mark Lawrence, Publications Officer  
Email: [publicatons@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:publicatons@snaicc.asn.au)  
Telephone: (03) 9489 8099

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#### Fees (including GST):

Government departments	\$100
Non-government organisations	\$55
Individuals	\$33

All subscriptions are paid annually, based on the financial year.

Members and affiliate members receive the newsletter as part of their membership.

#### For subscription inquiries contact:

Angelique Davis  
Email: [admin@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:admin@snaicc.asn.au)  
Telephone: (03) 9489 8099  
SNAICC, PO Box 1445, Fitzroy North, Victoria 3068  
[www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au)

# IN THIS EDITION



Welcome to another edition of *SNAICC News*. This has been a very busy time for the organisation, and there is much to report on SNAICC's activities. Consequently, you'll find an extended 'SNAICC Update' in this edition.

One of the things that kept SNAICC busy since the last newsletter (Winter 2008) was, of course, National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) on 4 August 2008. You will find the report on Minister Jenny Macklin launching Children's Day in the 'SNAICC Update' (page 4) as well as the report of Children's Day activities across the country (page 8). A big thank you to the services who shared stories and photographs of their Children's Day activities for this edition – Children's Day is about the children, but it wouldn't be the success it is each year without communities, organisations and services holding activities and celebrations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC has also been busy with various projects, including the LAC and Cultural Care Planning Project (page 11), and with our policy and advocacy work, including on the NT Intervention Review (see page 5) and SNAICC's new 'Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy' (page 6), to name but a few areas.

This edition of *SNAICC News* also features six pages of **Special Feature Content** on **Torres Strait Islander communities**, especially where it concerns children and families. A big thank you to those who contributed the photographs, articles, cultural information and perspectives that have made this Special Feature a success.

I hope you enjoy this edition, and look forward to your feedback. This is my last edition of *SNAICC News* for a while, as I will be moving into project work as a Project Officer with SNAICC for 12 months in December. Of course, you will still hear from me, but in a different capacity. It has been a pleasure to edit SNAICC's newsletter, and I'd like to thank those who have contributed to this newsletter over the last few years.

– Mark Lawrence, Publications Officer

## Quarterly newsletters not enough? Keep up with SNAICC's news by web and email

Receive fortnightly news updates on SNAICC's activities, policy and advocacy work and latest resources directly in your email inbox.

Subscribe to our fortnightly *SNAICC e-Bulletin* – a digest of news and reports of SNAICC's latest initiatives, resources and publications and developments in our sector from SNAICC's website.

Go to [www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au) and sign up to receive the *SNAICC e-Bulletin* in your email.

Or visit [www.snaicc.asn.au/news](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news) for regular news and updates.

## SNAICC News – celebrating SNAICC's 25 years Next edition: January 2009

We want to hear your stories of and experiences with SNAICC, or on your service's involvement with our organisation, from the last 25 years.

Send us your story or perspective for the next edition of *SNAICC News* before **1 December 2008**.

All other contributions of announcements, articles, reviews or news to SNAICC's quarterly newsletter are also welcome.

Please see SNAICC's website for details of deadlines and themes of future editions, and to download previous editions of the newsletter: [www.snaicc.asn.au/publications](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/publications)

Contact SNAICC for further information:  
telephone (03) 9489 8099; email: [snaicc@vicnet.net.au](mailto:snaicc@vicnet.net.au)

**STOP  
PRESS**

## A message from Julian Pocock

**A**fter almost eleven years as the SNAICC EO I will be resigning from my position as SNAICC Executive Officer in early 2009. I have no doubt that the SNAICC EO job is probably the best job I'll ever have but all good things come to an end. It has been a fantastic experience to work for SNAICC and through that work have the opportunity to grow and learn from a diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It's a good time for the organisation to recruit a new Executive Officer to support SNAICC as it builds further on its strong base of sound policy and extensive community and government networks.

I'll be remaining in the position until the end of March 2009 to allow SNAICC time to recruit a new EO. After that I'll be taking a break before seeing what opportunities emerge.

And finally could I take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson Muriel Bamblett, members of the National Executive and all the SNAICC staff for their support, trust and friendship over the past decade. Working with SNAICC wasn't the start of my commitment to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and resigning from SNAICC won't be the end.

– Julian Pocock,  
SNAICC Executive Officer

## SNAICC 2008 Annual General Meeting, Members Policy Forum and 25th Anniversary Dinner

**12–14 November 2008**

Sunsets at the Bay, Oaks Pacific Resort  
265 Sandy Point Road, Salamander Bay, NSW, 2317

### **Day One: Wednesday 12 November 2008 – Members Policy Forum**

#### **Major Issues for discussion:**

Development of the National Early Years Learning Framework – Consultation and Presentation by Dept of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

SNAICC AICCA/Child protection project – Presentation and consultation by Julie Higgins & Nikki Butler (SNAICC staff)

National Indigenous Representative Body – Consultation and update on models by FaHCSIA National Office

### **Day Two: 2008 – Thursday 13 November 2008**

#### **SNAICC AGM**

10am – 12:30pm  
and

#### **25th Anniversary AGM Dinner**

Sunsets at the Bay, Oaks Pacific Resort  
265 Sandy Point Road, Salamander Bay, NSW, 2317

### **Day Three: Friday 14 November 2008**

Visits to local Aboriginal services in the Newcastle area

The Annual General Meeting and Members Policy Forum are open to financial SNAICC Full Members. **All currently financial SNAICC Full Members have been sent the AGM notification and papers in the mail.** Affiliate members may attend the AGM and other general meetings but have no voting rights and cannot stand for election to the SNAICC National Executive.

#### **Accommodation**

If you are attending SNAICC's AGM and need to make accommodation arrangements, please contact Sunsets at the Bay directly:

<http://www.sunsetsatthebay.com.au>

Contact Maritsa Seehusen on telephone: (02) 4984 1017

For AGM queries and further information contact: Angelique Davis at the SNAICC office: telephone 03 9489 8099



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

#### **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?

As part of our anniversary celebrations this year, we want to hear and record your stories of aspects of SNAICC's history and our many campaigns.

**Contact the SNAICC office to share your stories and material:  
telephone (03) 9489 8099 or email: [publications@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:publications@snaicc.asn.au)**

# SNAICC Update

## SNAICC National Executive Elections

The SNAICC National Executive is the governing body of SNAICC and is elected by postal vote every two years for a two-year term. The National Executive is made up of representatives from all states and territories and includes local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care, early learning, and child and family welfare services, resource and training agencies and statewide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare bodies.

The role of the National Executive is to govern the organisation including setting SNAICC policy and monitoring the SNAICC Strategic Plan. The members of the National Executive are expected to focus broadly on the rights and needs of children rather than just the needs of their particular service type or agency.

Under the SNAICC constitution the financial members in each category elect their representative(s) for the SNAICC Executive by postal vote. If no nominations are received for a particular position then nominations can be taken at the AGM.

This year is an election year and the following have been elected for 2009 and 2010. Two nominations were received for the Northern Territory child care representative position and two nominations were received for the West Australia child care representative position.

Postal vote ballot were sent to eligible SNAICC financial members in those states/territories to elect the representatives. All other positions were elected unopposed.

Vacancies still exist for positions in the Northern Territory, the ACT and Tasmania and nominations for these positions can be taken at the Annual General Meeting from members from those states/territories.

After the AGM the newly elected National Executive can consider re-opening nominations or co-opting member organisations onto the National Executive to fill any remaining positions.

National Executive Members for 2009 and 2010 take office at the close of the 2008 AGM and are as follows:

### ACT

No nominations received

### New South Wales

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community

Care State Secretariat (AbSec). Name of Delegate: Steve Larkins

Multi-Purpose Allira Gathering Association (Allira MACS). Name of Delegate: Shirley Wilson

### Northern Territory

Regional and Remote Aboriginal Children Services Support Unit (RRACSSU North). Name of Delegate: Kim Whitburn

### Queensland

Queensland Aboriginal & Islander Health Council (QAIHC) – Child Protection Partnership. Name of Delegate: Donna Klein

Gundoo Day Care Centre (Cherbourg). Name of Delegate: Ray Burrows

### South Australia

Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS). Name of Delegate: Sharron Williams

Aboriginal Resource Management Support Unit (ARMSU). Name of Delegate: Debbie Bond

### Tasmania

Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association Inc. Name of Delegate: Lisa Coulson

### Victoria

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Name of Delegate: TBA

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI). Name of Delegate: Geraldine Atkinson

### West Australia

Yorganop Child Care Aboriginal Corporation. Name of Delegate: Dawn Wallam

Gurlongga Njinyinj Association Inc. MACS Child Care. Name of Delegate: Dot Bagshaw

### Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Learning and Preschool Services

Cape York & Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Child Care (RRATSICC). Name of Delegate: Desley Thompson

Batdja Preschool. Name of Delegate: Rose Bamblett

### Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Welfare Services

Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Family Community Care Centre. Name of Delegate: Garry Matthews

Central Queensland Aboriginal & Islander Child Care Agency (CQAICCA). Name of delegate: Roderick Wright

## Children's Day launched by Minister Jenny Macklin in Melbourne

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) kicked off around the country on 4 August with a launch by Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) the Hon. Jenny Macklin, MP, and SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett, AM, at Yappera Children's Services in Thornbury, Melbourne.

SNAICC's Chairperson, Muriel Bamblett, said, "This year's Children's Day theme, 'Nurturing Our Children



NAICD celebrations at Yappera MACS included a kids' Olympics featuring Aboriginal games © SNAICC 2008 with thanks to Yappera





Minister Jenny Macklin congratulating SNAICC's Children's Day Project Officer Angelique Davis for another successful National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day at the launch at Yappera MACS in Thornbury, Melbourne. In the background are SNAICC staff members Nikki Butler and Kandiah Ragavan. Photo © SNAICC 2008

to Flourish', reinforces the message that SNAICC doesn't want kids just to be OK, we want them to flourish, achieve their greatest potential and enjoy the same quality of life as all other Australian children."

She said, "Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, like Yappera, are examples of best practice in supporting children's development and assisting families so their kids flourish." She reminded those gathered at the launch that Aboriginal communities fought hard, including marching on Canberra, to secure Aboriginal community-controlled and run services.

## **"Aboriginal communities fought hard to secure Aboriginal community-controlled and run services."**

Minister Jenny Macklin also spoke highly of Yappera as an example of the type of Indigenous early childhood service that fits with the Australian Government's early childhood strategy in 'closing the gap' in Indigenous children's disadvantage.

She highlighted SNAICC's 2008 Children's Activity Kit as a great example of the resources that SNAICC produces to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander child and family services in their work with children and their families.

**See the report on this year's Children's Day activities on page 8.**

## **Consultation and cooperation key to making NT Aboriginal communities safe for children**

SNAICC welcomes the NTER Review Board's Report as a major step toward reinstating self determination for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and securing the safety and well-being of Aboriginal children.

The NTER Review Board's findings are reinforcement of the many concerns that SNAICC has expressed about the federal NT Intervention.

In particular, the NTER Review Board has highlighted the need for the Northern Territory and federal governments to consult and work with Aboriginal communities to deliver the changes necessary to secure the safety and well-being of Aboriginal children. This is something SNAICC has called for since the previous federal government first announced its intervention in NT Aboriginal communities.

When the federal government commissioned the NTER Review Board to assess the effectiveness of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), the government promised the review would take an 'evidence based approach', and that the government would listen to the evidence on what was working and not working and act accordingly. Now the government must do as it promised.

The Review Board travelled around NT Aboriginal communities collecting evidence and took community submissions and it

has found overwhelmingly that blanket community-wide welfare quarantining does not work.

SNAICC calls on the federal government to immediately implement the NTER Review Board's recommendations to:

- 1) Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act fully in the Northern Territory,
- 2) Repeal blanket community-wide welfare quarantining in Aboriginal communities, and
- 3) Work with the Northern Territory government and Aboriginal communities to implement community safety plans to safeguard Aboriginal children and the wider communities.

The Board found overwhelmingly that the federal and NT governments must re-engage with Aboriginal communities to ensure the success of future initiatives.

SNAICC concurs with their findings that effective, positive change in Aboriginal communities must come from the ground up, rather than be imposed from outside or above.

SNAICC will continue to work with the federal government on the implementation of these recommendations and other strategies to secure the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families.

The Review Board made its report to the federal government in mid-October. The full report is available on the Board's website:

<http://www.nterreview.gov.au/report.htm>

See the next item for information on SNAICC's submission to the NTER Review.

## **SNAICC's NT Intervention review submission**

SNAICC presented a briefing to the NTER Review Board on SNAICC's concerns with the progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett and SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock met with the NTER Review Board's Chair, Peter Yu, and Marcia Ella Duncan and Bill Gray, AM in Canberra. SNAICC also made a written submission.

In SNAICC's submission and our briefing, we raised strong concerns to NTER Review Board that despite the

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## SNAICC Update

stated intention of the NT emergency intervention being about protecting Aboriginal children from abuse, there has not been enough concerted effort on protecting children from harm.

While child protection notifications in other states and territories continue to rise, and their child protection systems are stretched, the figures for the Northern Territory remain relatively low.

Since the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse and the subsequent release of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, there has been no significant increase in notifications, substantiations or placements of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in the Northern Territory. As stated in our submission:

“This is cause for grave concern and suggests that systems firstly for ensuring children’s well-being and secondly for protecting them from harm are still seriously flawed and lacking capacity across the Northern Territory.

Sadly, despite all this attention there is still no agreed and articulated long-term reform agenda for child protection in the Northern Territory that brings together governments and the community sector.”

SNAICC has directed the Review Board’s attention to our long-standing call for a national approach to preventing child abuse and neglect and in particular SNAICC’s 10 Point National Action Plan to Stop Child Abuse and Neglect as the way

forward to enhance children’s well-being and better protect children at risk.

The federal government set up the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) Review Board to review the progress of the NTER, with a commitment to an ‘evidence-based review’.

You can download SNAICC’s submission from the Submissions page on the Policy and Advocacy section of our website:

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

SNAICC’s 10 Point National Action Plan is available from the Policy and Advocacy section of our website:

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/default.cfm?loadref=55#10points>

SNAICC’s submission to the NTER Review Board is available from the ‘Policy Papers’ page of our website:

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

### National Compact between Australian Government and social services

The Australian Government has asked the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to consult not-for-profit organisations, and the people who use them, about a compact and prepare a report for the government and the sector. A compact is intended to be a broad agreement that sets out how the government works with community sector organisations, supports them in their roles and provides some clearer opportunities for them to be involved in government policy development.

The ACOSS consultations were the first stage in the development of the National Compact, with the results to inform both what the compact includes and the next

**“The compact has to focus on and change the way government works with community organisations rather than merely focussing on how community organisations do their work.”**

stage of consultations.

Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector, is responsible for the development of the compact and has appointed an advisory committee to

oversee future consultations. The SNAICC Executive Officer has been appointed to that advisory committee.

SNAICC supports the idea of a compact with the proviso that it makes a real difference to the way in which government departments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. SNAICC believes that departments need to move beyond being contract managers that see their role as purchasing services from the community sector to supporting community development and local control of service delivery. In short, the compact has to focus on and change the way government works with community organisations rather than merely focussing on how community organisations do their work.

ACOSS has been coordinating consultations across the country while FaHCSIA have sought submissions on the idea of a national compact. SNAICC anticipates that work on the compact will continue in 2009 with opportunities to comment on a draft national compact.

#### More information:

ACOSS:

<http://acoss.org.au/Events.aspx?displayID=1>

FaHCSIA:

[http://www.facs.gov.au/Internet/facsinternet.nsf/News/4\\_aug\\_australian\\_compact.htm](http://www.facs.gov.au/Internet/facsinternet.nsf/News/4_aug_australian_compact.htm)

### Enabling self determination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services

SNAICC has developed new policy on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have the right to develop their own community-based services.

The policy paper, ‘SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy’, was endorsed by SNAICC’s National Executive meeting in July 2008, and is now available from our website.

The policy also outlines the important roles non-Indigenous service providers can play in developing programs that respect cultural rights and identity, whilst assisting at the local level in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

SNAICC recognises how the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based organisations





From left: SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock, ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum and AbSec Executive Officer Bill Pritchard at the signing ceremony at the 2008 ACWA Conference where NSW child welfare agencies endorsed SNAICC's Services Development Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy. Photo courtesy of ACWA © ACWA 2008

have been an important part of the response of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to colonisation. Through these organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been able to express their collective will, advocate for their rights and needs, develop services and programs for their families and maintain their cultural traditions.

In the policy paper, SNAICC also outlines our belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – as Australian citizens – have a right to expect that all government funded and supported programs within the community services sector will be committed to culturally respectful service delivery and culturally safe practices.

As such, government funding bodies should work respectfully, openly and collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and agencies to define, develop and deliver services and programs in a culturally respectful manner.

The 'SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy' paper is available from the Policy Papers page of the Policy and Advocacy section of our website:

[http://www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/default\\_news\\_resources.cfm?loadref=62](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/default_news_resources.cfm?loadref=62)

## NSW child welfare sector's endorsement of Services Policy welcomed

SNAICC has welcomed the latest moves by New South Wales community sector organisations to support Indigenous self determination over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services.

On Wednesday 20 August the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) along with heads of New South Wales's community sector organisations formally expressed their commitment to supporting Aboriginal-controlled child and family welfare services by formally endorsing SNAICC's Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy.

The NSW sector's commitment will go beyond symbolism, however, with a new network of specialist Aboriginal child and family welfare organisations to be established in New South Wales under a plan being backed by the state's human services sector.

The signing ceremony took place in Sydney at ACWA's 14th Conference and was witnessed by SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock and AbSec Executive Officer Bill Pritchard.

SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock applauded ACWA and its members for taking a stand in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

"In generations past, welfare agencies and authorities presumed that they knew what was best for Indigenous children. The best way to support vulnerable families and children is for Indigenous and non-Indigenous services to pool their resources, expertise and knowledge," he said.

"ACWA is making a commitment to support the development of specialist Aboriginal child welfare agencies across NSW and to work in partnership with those agencies to improve the lives of children. SNAICC will be highlighting the progressive stand taken by ACWA to other states and encouraging others to follow their lead."

Bill Pritchard, Executive Officer of the NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (AbSEC) said: "It is important this sector acknowledges the cultural diversity of Aboriginal Australia and works in a co-operative, respectful and committed manner to achieve the outcomes outlined in SNAICC's services plan."

ACWA CEO Andrew McCallum agrees a united approach is key to facilitating the growth and development of Indigenous organisations. "It is also important as a sector that we remember the lessons of the past and avoid repeating them," he said.

For more information on ACWA, see:

[www.acwa.asn.au](http://www.acwa.asn.au)

More information on the NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (AbSEC) is on their website:

[www.absec.org.au](http://www.absec.org.au)

## Welcome new SNAICC staff

SNAICC saw the arrival of three new staff members in mid-October. Catriona Elek is our new SRS Manager, taking up the position vacated by Veronica Johns after her recent return to the Top End.

Jane Harrison, meanwhile, takes up SNAICC's new Child Rearing Project as the CRP Project Officer.

Sue Beecher takes on a redeveloped position as SNAICC's Staff and Organisational Development Manager, partially filling in as SNAICC's Governance and Planning Manager Kim Werner has gone on 12 months maternity leave.

SNAICC welcomes all three on board. You can learn more about them on page 19 of this edition.

Also, welcome back to Carmen Isherwood, who has returned to SNAICC after maternity leave. ●





National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day was celebrated by children's services across the country, including in Eidsvold (above, left and below right – see the story on the facing page) and in Launceston (see facing page). Eidsvold photos courtesy of Burnett Responding Early Assisting Children (REACH) Program; Launceston photos courtesy of TACA; copyright held by respective organisations

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services showcase how we nurture our children to flourish

## National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day celebrated across the country

By Angelique Davis, NAICD Project Officer

**A** warm thank you to all who participated in and celebrated National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD). This year's initiative was enjoyed by a large number of communities nationally, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service organisations, child and family service providers, child care centres and other early childhood services, preschools and primary schools.

Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs the Hon Jenny Macklin, MP launched Aboriginal and Torres Strait Children's Day with Muriel Bamblett AM, Chairperson of SNAICC, at an event at Yappera Children's Service Cooperative Ltd in Thornbury, Melbourne, on 4 August 2008. (See the *SNAICC Update* for more news on both the Minister's and our Chairperson's comments on the day.)

Since 1988 SNAICC has been celebrating National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day on 4 August, and this year many activities across the country

marked this special day.

The following provides a summary of some of the events that were held around the country for the day:

- Besides hosting the launch, Yappera held a range of NAICD activities for the children at the service, including a mini olympics and games, BBQ lunch, and a clown visit to entertain children and family members
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency held a community event for children and families. Activities included 'healthy fruit' costumes, games and prizes, showbags, music and other entertainment for children and young people
- Farm and Rural Mobile Services for Children (FARMS) Mitta Mitta Kindergarten celebrated NAICD with children, staff and family in a range of cultural activities including stories, art
- and cooking. Everybody enjoyed wattle seed damper for afternoon tea
- Local service providers in the Wellington Council area joined forces to celebrate NAICD with Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service, Barnardos and PCYC providing activities, games, entertainment and BBQ for families and early childhood services
- Wayeela Cooina preschool celebrated with Indigenous art activities for children, a cultural arts and craft workshop, story telling, community BBQ, boomerang throwing, and body and face painting. *The Dreaming* DVD was shown and followed by discussion and activities
- Ipswich Family Day Care – Carer's Support Group included NAICD information in their newsletters leading up to 04 August, distributing leaflets, posters, stickers and activity suggestions to approximately 80 network members. NAICD activities were enjoyed during playgroup sessions.
- Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place planned a community event for all to enjoy, including cultural art and craft activities, Indigenous games and sports, a free BBQ lunch and face painting



- Warrawon Children's House held a morning tea and an Arts and Crafts Day with traditional songs and dancing
- Wuchopperen Health Service arranged a community event with stalls, BBQ lunch, face painting, arts and crafts, prizes and t-shirt (NAICD theme) giveaway and traditional dancers and songs
- Central Queensland Indigenous Development in association with representatives from local schools, police, rotary, Queensland chaplaincy and CHRC have formulated a Road Safety Partnership. In acknowledgement of NAICD, the partnership organised a bike awareness BBQ. Police representatives provided short activities and safety information. Volunteers helped out on the day to prepare food that was donated by local bakery and butcher outlets. Bike trailers were supplied to give children not owning bikes the opportunity to participate.
- First Step Early Learning Centre held a picnic for parents and families within centre. An Elder was invited to attend the picnic, which also had art activities and story telling.

Once again, this year's Children's Activity Kit, produced by SNAICC for Children's Day, was extremely popular. SNAICC distributed over 2000 Children's Day Activity Kits to child and family welfare services, child care centres, preschools and other services right across Australia to support them to run activities for Children's Day and beyond. The kits included ideas on play-based cultural

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## Children's Day celebrations in Launceston

By Lisa Coulson, Director, TACA



For National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day this year, Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA) celebrated with an open day at the centre. The staff, children and visitors participated in art and craft activities, shared stories and a healthy lunch and played together.

Well known Tasmanian artist Vicki West visited TACCA and taught the children how to work with bull kelp, which was used by our ancestors to make baskets and water carriers.

Aboriginal Early Years Education Officer Lyn Spotswood also visited and worked with the children making a mutton bird mobile and friendship collage.

Aunty Phyllis Pitchford, a well known and respected Elder, visited to share stories of her childhood with the children.

Everyone had a wonderful time and we feel very lucky to have such strong



support within our community and to have such special people share their lives and knowledge with the children. ●



## Children's Day in Eidsvold

Eidsvold Aboriginal Children's Activities celebrated National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day this year with a morning tea, lunch under a magnificent shady tree, and Indigenous games and art activities with a strong Aboriginal theme from SNAICC's Children's Activity Kit (see the photos on the facing page).

It was a great day for all – we had about 25 children and their mums/carers attend, as well as local Elders and the kindy students.

The Playgroup Coordinator (Ismay

Law) and I collaborated in organising the day and received lots of help from parents, family, friends and community on the day – it was fantastic to see everyone working together.

Eidsvold is a small community approximately two hours south west of Bundaberg, Queensland. The Eidsvold Aboriginal Children's Activities (EACA) playgroup runs three mornings a week from 9–3. Everyone is welcome as long as children are accompanied by a parent.

– Deirdre Rackemann, Project Officer, North Burnett Responding Early Assisting Children (REACH) Program



## National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care Getting it right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

The federal government is developing a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care to replace the existing national child care quality improvement and accreditation system and create a broad national early years learning framework. Potentially the new system could also replace the state and territory based licensing arrangements for children's services.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is responsible for the development of the framework and recently took submissions on a discussion paper and coordinated community consultations in all states and territories.

### The new quality assurance and accreditation system needs the flexibility to support quality service provision for a diverse range of Indigenous services.

Currently specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services are, like all children's services, licensed by their state or territory. Many of these services, including the Multifunctional Aboriginal

Children's Services (MACS), however, have been left out of the federal government's quality assurance accreditation system for child care.

The existing quality assurance and accreditation system suits enrolment-based child care programs and concerns itself with what happens when kids are 'at the centre' or 'in the program'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services typically work at a community level and aim to support local families to raise their kids well. This results in them being focused not just on the kids that come to child care but also those that don't by providing family support and assistance for kids who may not come to child care

To be more relevant than the existing system the new quality assurance and accreditation system needs the flexibility to support quality service provision for a diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, including:

- Multifunctional community-based services that provide community level child care and have a community development orientation towards supporting families to care well for their children. The proposed Indigenous child and family hubs would be examples of this type of service. Many, perhaps even all, of these services would have some

long day care centre based child care provision but this would be only one element of the child care and support they provide to families.

- Specialist enrolment-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services that focus predominantly on provision of care for children enrolled in formal child care arrangements. These types of services would include Long Day Care, JET crèches, Outside School Hours Care Programs and Innovative Indigenous Child Care services.
- Family and parent participation models focused on mobile service provision, playgroups, facilitated playgroups and intensive support playgroups.

To make a significant difference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care and early years services, not only do we need to get this framework right but we have to invest in and implement a number of related reforms, including:

- workforce development focusing on training and employing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the job in their local services,
- supporting communities to establish new services and assisting existing service to adapt and expand their service models,
- reforming practice within non-Indigenous specific services (mainstream services),
- creating a regulatory environment (licensing) that supports rather than stymies innovation,
- integrating segmented early childhood programs (child care and preschool) into seamless programs, and
- recognising that child care assistance and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families often means something quite different from the child care assistance typically sought by other Australian families.

DEEWR will shortly start work on a second stage of consultations that looks at a draft framework. SNAICC will continue to advocate that the new system has to be more sophisticated and flexible than the old models of child care accreditation.

A full copy of SNAICC's submission is now available on the Submissions page of SNAICC's website:

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

Hard copies are also available on request from the SNAICC office: tel (03) 9489 8099 or email [admin@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:admin@snaicc.asn.au)

– **Julian Pocock, SNAICC Executive Officer**



# Looking After Children (LAC) and Cultural Care Planning Project

By Nikki Butler, SNAICC Project Officer

**S**NAICC is currently undertaking a project partnership with Barnardos Australia called the 'LAC and Cultural Care Planning' project to ensure that the LAC case management and cultural care planning tool can meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. SNAICC Policy Manager Julie Higgins and I are conducting the project, while Ms Terri Libesman from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Law Faculty has been contracted as the research partner to conduct aspects of the project in partnership with SNAICC.

**“This SNAICC project aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in or entering the out-of-home care system have an effective case management and cultural care planning process.”**

Looking After Children (LAC) is a case management tool designed to improve outcomes for children who are cared for in foster care and residential care. LAC, a forms-based system, is broadly divided into planning and placement tools with associated assessment and action tools. LAC is currently used by a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in Victoria, New South Wales and ACT.

Cultural care planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in or entering the out-of-home care system is about maintaining the child's connection to family and community, and promoting and encouraging the child's sense of cultural and spiritual identity. It involves the development, implementation and monitoring of cultural tools and resources, for example cultural support plans.

The Australian LAC case management system, adapted to local conditions, is based on the UK Department of Health model,

which was originally developed in the early 1990s. It is now being used in 15 countries to various degrees to meet the international problem of poor outcomes for children in out-of-home care. LAC was adapted for Australian use by The LAC Project Australia, through Barnados Australia, who holds the license for LAC in Australia.

This SNAICC project aims to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in or entering the out-of-home care system have an effective case management and cultural care planning process. The project will be relevant to out-of-home care agencies in all states and territories that provide care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Initial key questions for us to research and respond to are:

- What is the most effective way to undertake cultural planning for children in or entering out-of-home care?
- How can assessment based on the dimensions of Looking After Children Assessment and Action Records be made more appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?
- What implementation tools are needed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services to use LAC more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children?

#### The key project outcomes will be:

1. A revised LAC Assessment and Action tool for use with all children to reflect the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
2. A discussion paper on cultural care planning, which will outline and discuss the core elements of cultural planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In line with the core elements discussed in this discussion paper, The LAC Project Australia will amend the LAC Planning and Placement tools. It is envisioned that the discussion paper will include commentary on the current state of play in each Australian state in regard to cultural care planning.

3. A document providing implementation advice on recommended strategies to support use of the revised Action and Assessment records by agencies and practitioners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

4. All revised LAC case management tools (paper version) to be provided free of charge to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out-of-home care agency on completion of an End User Agreement with The LAC Project Australia, facilitated by SNAICC. Access to LACES (LAC Electronic system) can be available on application.

In early 2009 a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations will be interviewed to gain their feedback on the LAC Assessment and Action Records. A number of services will also be interviewed to generally discuss cultural care planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

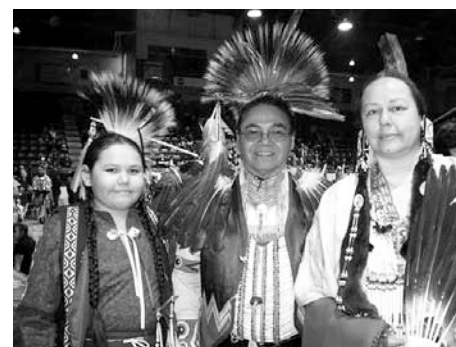
The project team is aiming to hold two national forums between October and November 2009. The first forum will be held to discuss the findings from the interviews in relation to the LAC Records, and to present the project recommendations in regards to amending LAC to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

The second national forum will be aimed at presenting the findings from research and interviews in relation to cultural care planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, and discuss the project team's formulated view on how states and territories may develop performance indicators for, and measure the outcomes of, successful cultural care planning.

Please feel free to contact Julie Higgins (Project Manager) at [julie@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:julie@snaicc.asn.au) or Nikki Butler (Project Officer) at [project6@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:project6@snaicc.asn.au), or by telephone on (03) 9489 8099, if you have a particular interest in being involved in this project or would like more information. ●







# World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education

**Melbourne, 7 –11 December 2008**

The World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (WIPC:E) is coming to Melbourne, with an expected attendance of 3,000 Indigenous people from communities across the world. This December will mark the first time a community-controlled organisation has hosted WIPC:E, and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc invites all to partake in this global education experience.

The VAEAI has always promoted Koorie education as a birth to death philosophy, so it is no surprise that this year's conference is incorporating an early childhood focus. "The WIPC:E 2008 program reflects community-grounded principles that see Aboriginal education as being holistic and lifelong," said Dr Mark Rose, Chair of the WIPC:E 2008 Knowledge Committee.

The following conference sessions give an idea of the breadth of discussion and the learning exchange set to take place at WIPC:E 2008, but remember these are just three out of the 400 sessions on offer:

- Adelaide University and Christie Downs Kindergarten, Ngarrindjeri Community, will run an interactive workshop looking at Comparative Approaches to Indigenous Early Childhood Education – Canada, Australia and Aotearoa (New

Zealand). The experiences of Indigenous educators in these three former British colonies have ranged from enforced assimilation and racism to an enlightened and supportive Indigenous perspective being incorporated. Discussions will explore the amount of cultural content and local community involvement, as well as non-Indigenous institutional influences determining the extent and direction of development in meeting the needs of young children with an Indigenous perspective.

- The University of British Columbia and The BC Aboriginal Child Care Society will present, from a Canadian perspective, Realizing "Quality Care" in Indigenous Early Childhood Development. They assert that descriptions of "quality care" in mainstream literature reflect Western values, and will discuss the ways Indigenous early childhood practitioners and community stakeholders conceptualise and implement "quality care". Five themes will be explored: Indigenous knowledge, self-determination, holistic view of child development, family and community involvement, and Indigenous language.

- Core of Life Peninsula Health in partnership with Yirrkala Women's Centre will present the interactive workshop Empowering Indigenous Australians in Remote Communities for a Positive Parenting Future. They will look at Core of Life's 'hands on' life education program designed by midwives presenting Indigenous adolescents real and factual information about being pregnant, giving birth and parenting a newborn.

The conference will be governed by the theme "Indigenous Education in the 21st Century – Respecting Tradition, Shaping the Future". As well as four jam packed working days, WIPC:E will include two huge cultural events: the Traditional Welcome to Country Ceremony at the Aborigines Advancement League and the Closing Ceremony at Rod Laver Arena with a Parade of Nations and special performances by some of Indigenous Australia's performing stars.

To view the full program please go to: [www.wipce2008.com](http://www.wipce2008.com)

**By Jirra Lulla Harvey  
 Media and Communication Consultant  
 World Indigenous Peoples' Conference:  
 Education**

# Welcome new SNAICC staff

## Catriona Elek



Hi, my name's Catriona Elek. I've recently joined the SNAICC team as the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) Manager. I'll be working with the SRS team to look after our many current projects and resources, and to develop new projects working in partnership with local organisations and communities.

I'm not only new to SNAICC, but to Melbourne, too, having lived in a few other parts of Australia – Canberra, Sydney and Alice Springs.

I've worked in community services since graduating from uni, as a youth worker, an educator, a community researcher and a manager, and a few other things in between! Until June this year, I worked with Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs as their Manager of Social Services. Before that, I also worked for Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health on a research project about antenatal care in central Australia.

I'm excited to join the SNAICC team and am looking forward to working alongside SNAICC members. Please feel very welcome to be in touch any time if you want to talk to me about any SRS projects or ideas. You can email me at [catriona@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:catriona@snaicc.asn.au)

## Jane Harrison



Hello to all you fellas out there! My name is Jane Harrison, I have Muruwari heritage and I'm the mother of two gorgeous girls. I am new to SNAICC and was thrilled to be engaged as the Child Rearing Stories Project Officer. I'm looking forward to collecting and sharing positive stories on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families grow up children.

Storytelling is my passion, along with the well-being of children and finding creative ways to enhance their cultural connection.

While I have been previously employed as the Aboriginal Research Officer at La Trobe University and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, I also have a parallel life as a playwright and writer. My plays include *Stolen* and *Rainbow's End*, the latter of which is on the NSW HSC English list for 2009–2012. I also contributed one chapter to *Many Voices: Reflections on experiences of Indigenous child separation*, which for me was a profound experience.

I am looking forward to working in partnership with many of you and welcome your ideas, contributions and feedback on this exciting project as it evolves. Drop me an email at [janeh@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:janeh@snaicc.asn.au) if you want to get involved.

## Sue Beecher



Hi all, my name is Sue Beecher. I am one of the new 'kids on the block' – having recently joined SNAICC as the Staff and Organisational Development Manager. While this title sounds a little long winded, basically I am here to develop a program of workplace student placements and traineeships at SNAICC, as well as supporting the staff here in any professional development and training.

You will find me here on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and I spend the remainder of the week divided between teaching social workers, volunteering at Stolen Generations Victoria, and running around after our four children, who are not so little any longer.

My background has been varied, ranging from nursing to merchant banking, and finally working with families in a range of positions – from couple counselling to supervising teams of social workers and psychologists in mainstream organisations.

My training in narrative therapy has had a strong influence on the way I practice, which is both collaborative and respectful. My passion in life is to work alongside colleagues and the families I have the privilege to know.

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## Children's Day celebrated across the country

activities for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children.

Most were provided free to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. The rest were sold to government departments for use in schools, and to non-Indigenous child and family services. We sold out well before Children's Day. You can find out more about the kit from the website (see the web

address at the end of this report).

Besides the Activity Kit, SNAICC also distributed thousands of posters and leaflets free for Children's Day to services across the country. SNAICC has produced a Children's Day poster each year featuring the theme for the year since we initiated Children's Day in 1988.

If you would like to share your feedback

or stories for this year's NAICD, or make suggestions for next year, please contact me at the SNAICC office: telephone (03) 9489 8099 or email [snaicc@vicnet.net.au](mailto:snaicc@vicnet.net.au)

More information about and photos if NAICD events can be found on the SNAICC website at:

[www.snaicc.asn.au/children/](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/children/)

Or feel free to contact me (Angelique Davis) at SNAICC on (03) 9489 8099; or email [snaicc@vicnet.net.au](mailto:snaicc@vicnet.net.au)

See also the report on the launch of Children's Day at Yappera MACS on page 4.

# Australia's Indigenous minority – Torres Strait Islanders

By Paul Ban

Torres Strait Islanders are Melanesian and part of the Pacific Islander group of kinship-based societies, together with Micronesians and Polynesians. They are Australia's Indigenous minority, with approximately 33,300 identifying as of Torres Strait Islander origin and 21,100 identifying as of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.\* However, the figures are uncertain due to the unreliability of the census data. Although Torres Strait Islanders live in all states of Australia, most of the population live on the mainland of Queensland.

Of the 6,000 or so who live in the Torres Strait, between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea, approximately half live on Thursday Island

and the remainder live on the 14 outer islands in the Strait. Thursday Island is the commercial centre of the Torres Strait and was established by Europeans as the administrative hub. It has a multi-cultural population of Islanders, Asians and Australians of European origin.

Due to their relative isolation, following European contact initially by explorers and later by the London Missionary Society in 1871, Torres Strait Islanders remained in their homeland until after World War Two and their culture and traditions were left reasonably intact. Although most Torres Strait Islanders have chosen to live on the mainland, they retain a strong connection to their homeland and also retain family traditions and customs.

Torres Strait Islanders were able to incorporate Christianity into their existing social organisations, with island chiefs becoming church leaders. The hierarchy that controlled social and religious life adapted their pre-contact mode of operating to

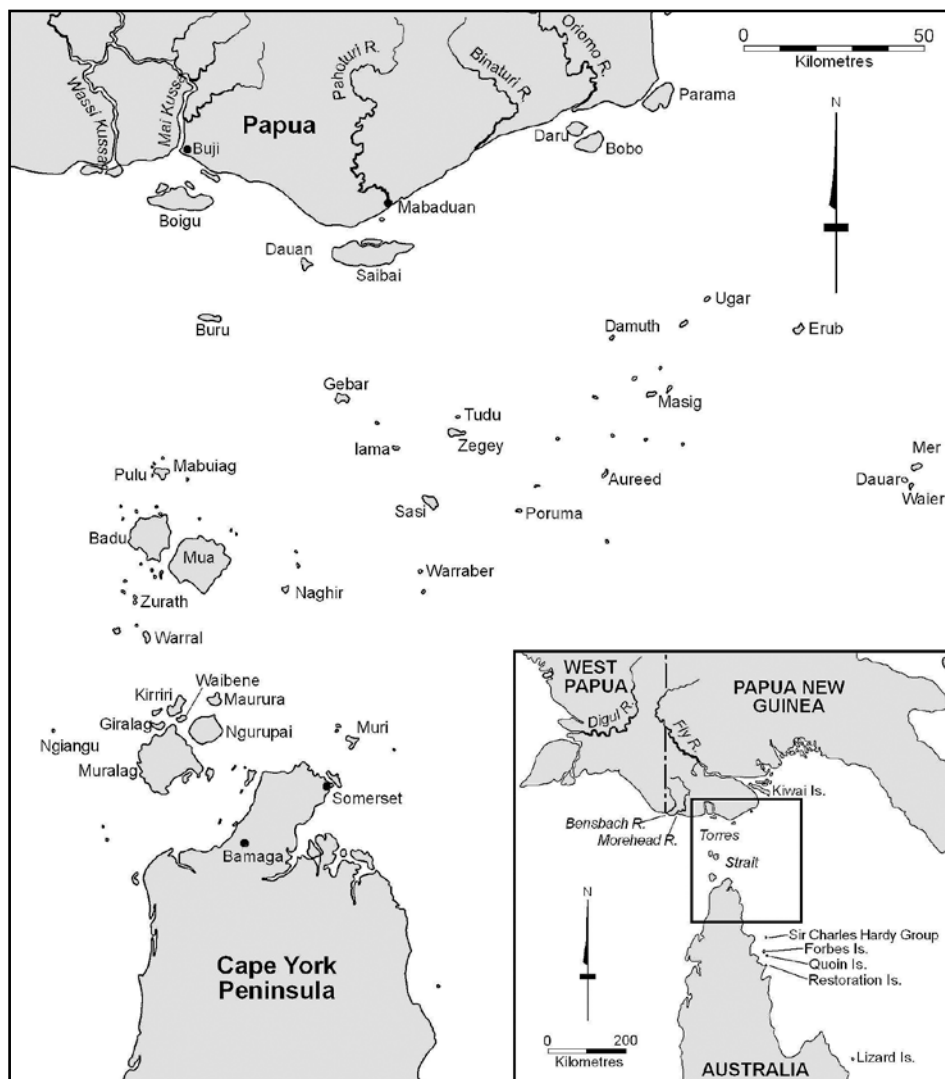
**“Although most Torres Strait Islanders have chosen to live on the mainland, they retain a strong connection to their homeland and also retain family traditions and customs.”**

the new influences brought by European contact. The overall effect of these two factors has been that Islanders have not experienced the extent of the negative impacts suffered by Aboriginal people, as they were not forcibly removed from their traditional lands.

The islands of the Torres Strait are divided into the following four main regions: the Eastern Islands, which are volcanic in origin, which have rich soil and rise sharply from the sea; the Central Islands, which are flat sandy coral cays; the Top Western Islands situated next the coast of Papua New Guinea, which are low lying mangrove islands; and the Western Islands, which are remnants of the Australian Great Dividing Range and consist of old volcanic rock and have scrub vegetation.

Eastern Islanders speak their own traditional language known as Meriam Mer, while Western Islanders speak Kala Lagau Ya. Islanders use Creole, or Pidgin English, to communicate with each other. While English is widely understood and taught in the Torres Strait, most Islanders in the region use English as their second or third language.

**Note:** \*Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Experimental Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Jun 2006





# ‘Falling Through the Cracks’ – the right of Torres Strait Islander children to be raised within the customs and traditions of their society

Melbourne-based conflict resolution practitioner and community advocate **Paul Ban** considers the difficulties Torres Strait Islander families face because the Queensland government refuses to provide legal recognition and protection for the Torres Strait Islander customary practice of adoption.

**T**orres Strait Islander children have the right to be raised within the customs and traditions of their society. However there is currently a threat of uncertainty to that right created by the Queensland government not legally recognising Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices. The child rearing practice in question involves a transfer of the raising of a child from one party to another, almost always within extended family. This has similarities with the western term ‘adoption’ but also has fundamental differences.

**“Cutomary ‘adoption’ is a widespread practice that involves all Torres Strait Islander extended families in some way, either as direct participants or as kin to ‘adopted’ children.”**

The custom has a great deal in common with the Western term ‘altruistic surrogacy.’ Legislation regarding both altruistic surrogacy and adoption are currently being reviewed by the Queensland Government. However, there is a strong likelihood that the Torres Strait Islander custom may not be considered as relevant to both these reviews and be left to ‘fall through the cracks.’



Photo by May Kabay © May Kabay 2007

## ‘Adoption’ practice of Torres Strait Islanders

Cutomary ‘adoption’ is a widespread practice that involves all Torres Strait Islander extended families in some way, either as direct participants or as kin to ‘adopted’ children. ‘Adoption’ takes place between relatives and close friends where bonds of trust have already been established. Some of the reasons for the widespread nature of ‘adoption’ include:

- To maintain the family bloodline by adopting (usually) a male child from a relative. This is linked to the inheritance of traditional land in the islands.
- To keep the family name by adopting a male child from a relative or close friend into the family.
- To give a family who cannot have a child due to infertility the joy of raising a child. A married couple may give a child to either a single person or another couple. ‘Relinquishment’ is not restricted to single parents.
- To strengthen alliances and bonds between the two families concerned.
- To distribute boys and girls more evenly

between families who may only have children of one sex.

- To replace a child who had been adopted out to another family – this may occur within extended families.
- To replace a child into the family once a woman has left home so that the grandparents would still have someone to care for.

The most common way is for a promise to be made while a woman is pregnant for the child she is carrying to be adopted by another family on the child’s birth. There are other circumstances and customs under which children are adopted into other families.

The underlying principle of Torres Strait Islander ‘adoption’ is that giving birth to a child is not necessarily a reason to be raising the child. The issue of who rears a child is dependent on a number of social factors, such as those listed, and is a matter of individual consideration by the families involved. Children are never lost to the family of origin, as they are usually placed with relatives somewhere in the family network.

**continued on page 16**

## 'Falling Through the Cracks' – the right of Torres Strait Islander children to be raised within the customs and traditions of their society

The main characteristics of Torres Strait Islander 'adoption' are:

- It provides a sense of stability to the social order and is seen as having a useful social function
- It is characterised by the notions of reciprocity and obligation between the families involved
- It generally occurs within the wider network of the extended family and carries with it the intention of permanency
- It occurs frequently but can have an element of instability and fragility sometimes leading to its dissolution
- The arrangements for the care of the child are usually made between the birth parent(s) and the receiving parent(s) during the course of the pregnancy.

### Desire for legal recognition

As Torres Strait Islanders engage with government institutions and their regulations by virtue of being Australian



© Kenny Bedford 2004

**“Despite representations by Torres Strait Islanders to the Queensland government since 1990 for legal recognition of their child rearing practice, their concerns have been acknowledged but largely ignored.”**

citizens, they have encountered problems trying to retain this custom. Because their child rearing practice is not legally recognised by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments, they have no legal security and consequently no recourse when a dispute arises over the care of an 'adopted' child. This is particularly the case when parties live some distance from each other and cannot utilise traditional methods of conflict resolution.

In addition they would prefer the 'adopted' child has a new birth certificate reflecting the change in care arrangements and also prefer that 'adopted' children be treated the same as natural children under the laws of intestacy, as at present they have no legal status when an 'adoptive' parent dies without a will.

Despite representations by Torres Strait Islanders to the Queensland government since 1990 for legal recognition of their child rearing practice, their concerns have been acknowledged but largely ignored. This has been due to both politicians and public servants not being able to separate their limited understanding of the Island practice from the negative connotations of adoption experienced by Aboriginal people who were forcibly removed from their families and adopted by white Australians.

The Queensland government's inaction stems from a belief that Torres Strait Islanders are asking to have a process legalised that may not be in the best interests of the children involved. However there is a misunderstanding regarding how 'best interests' are considered from a Torres Strait Islander perspective, with the Queensland government imposing its definition and making little effort



Photo by May Kabay © May Kabay 2007

to understand another point of view. Consequently Torres Strait Islander children have been left to cope with the uncertainty of being raised within an ancient custom that has no legal validity in the country in which they have always lived.

**Paul Ban** lives in Melbourne and works independently as a conflict resolution practitioner in fields of family law and child protection. He has Masters Degrees in both Aboriginal Studies and Social Work and is currently undertaking a third in Conflict Resolution. Since 1990 he has worked as a consultant with the Torres Strait Islander community to help them gain legal recognition of the customary child rearing practices. He was the first to pilot the Maori influenced practice of family group conferencing for child protection matters in Australia in the early 1990s and has since provided training in this area both nationally and internationally.

### Further information

SNAICC recognises that customary adoptions within families are part of Torres Strait Islander culture and supports customary Torres Strait Islander adoptions within extended families.

Further details on SNAICC's policy on adoption are outlined in our policy paper *Achieving Stable and Culturally Strong Out of Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children* (published 2005). This publication is available electronically for download from the Policy Papers page of SNAICC's website:

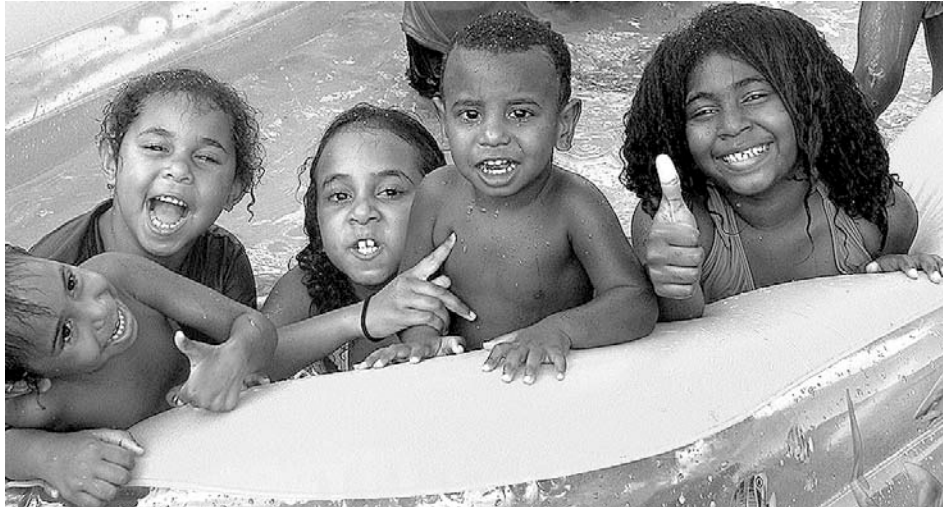
[www.snaicc.asn.au/policy](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/policy)



# Working with Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York Peninsula

By Mark Lawrence, SNAICC Publications Officer

Photo by May Kabay © May Kabay 2007



SNAICC spoke to Desley Thompson, Director of Services at RAATSICC, about working with Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland's Gulf country and Cape York. Desley also represents RAATSICC on SNAICC's National Executive.

When working with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, services need to bear in mind that while there are many similarities between them, Torres Strait Islander culture and Aboriginal culture are very different. Every effort should be made both on the mainland and in the Strait to ensure a service meets the needs of Torres Strait Islander communities, clients and staff.

For services like the Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Child Care (RAATSICC) Network, which operates across the communities of Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria, being sensitive to, and catering for, the needs and aspirations of Torres Strait Islander communities and families in its catchment is a central part of their work.

Desley Thompson had just finished a three-day visit to Pormpuraaw on the west coast of the Cape York Peninsula when she stopped on the side of a dirt road to talk to SNAICC on the phone.

As part of the visit to Pormpuraaw,

RAATSICC joined with the local clinic, police and youth club, Queensland government departments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander celebrities in providing information, activities, community education programs, and resources in a three-day community event. Desley had been delivering a program for the young people of Pormpuraaw. The whole-of-community event had been rounded off the night before with a community feast and a concert featuring Aboriginal comedian Mary G.

## Language is important

RAATSICC ensures the services, resources and programs it develops and provides in these areas meets the social, cultural, and organisational needs of Torres Strait Islander communities as well as the Aboriginal communities. According to Desley, "When RAATSICC holds activities and meetings in areas with Torres Strait Islander communities, we make sure our program suits the needs of the Torres Strait Islander communities. One way we do this is with language."

"When we are talking to an audience, someone from that community may also speak to participants in Creole, in some respect translating what we are saying or explaining the information in Creole. Even if a lot of the community understands English,

"it is important that there's a community member they know there speaking to them in their language – they can identify more with the person speaking and what they're saying."

## PROFILE

### Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Child Care (RAATSICC) Network

RAATSICC works with 23 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a region covering all Cape York Peninsula and all of the Gulf country. They also provide services to communities in Mossman, Yarrabah and Palm Island.

Many of these mainland communities are Torres Strait Islander communities, such as the three different Torres Strait Islander communities of the Northern Peninsula Area on the northern tip of Cape York, or towns and remote communities where Torres Strait Islander families live side-by-side with Aboriginal families.

RAATSICC works in resourcing, training and capacity building Indigenous services in the areas of early childhood, child care, and child and family welfare.

RAATSICC ensures that the services, resources and programs it develops and provides in these areas meets the social, cultural, and organisational needs of Torres Strait Islander communities as well as the Aboriginal communities.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are different, a number of things are shared in common by these communities, including the remoteness, dirt roads, rough terrain and difficult conditions of the country.

Find out more at: [www.raatsicc.org.au](http://www.raatsicc.org.au)

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## Working with Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York Peninsula

and many of us RAATSICC workers may have learned a bit of Creole over the years, it is important that there's a community member they know there speaking to them in their language – they can identify more with the person speaking and what they're saying."

"It is also important to give space for the community to yarn together in Creole during these activities, if they want too."

Another step RAATSICC takes is to produce a number of publications and resources in Creole. "Creole is the language that a majority of Torres Strait Islander communities in the Cape are familiar with, whichever island they are originally from," says Desley.

### The sea is important

The sea is very important to Torres Strait Islander communities and their culture, so RAATSICC incorporates elements of the sea in ensuring its resources and programs suit Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes recognising the importance of dugongs, turtles, sharks, barramundi, crabs, crocodiles and others in everything from traditional food and hunting to stories, totems, and ceremonies, as well as using these elements in the stories, designs and artwork for resources.

This also matches the needs of Aboriginal communities on the Cape and Gulf country, for whom the sea is also very important. 90 per cent of the communities RAATSICC works with are by the sea.

But the importance of the sea also has its practical application. "We are always talking about crocodiles – not just about

**"When visiting a community to run an activity you need to ensure you are familiar with the protocols, and find out what's happening in the community before you go."**

keeping safe around them, but also in cultural terms, being careful not to hurt them or stir them as they are very important totems," says Desley.

RAATSICC also incorporates activities around the beaches and fishing for young people and communities.

### Feasting is important

Feasting is also very important to Torres Strait Islander communities. It is an important part of their ceremonies as well as community life, and RAATSICC and other services in the Cape incorporate it into their activities.

"The whole community gets involved in preparing for a feast. When we had the three-day event in Pormpuraaw, we finished the whole event with a feast and a concert at night. We had around 300 people in the community involved in the feast," Desley says.

"The men hunted for wild pigs, which they cooked in the ground, and went crabbing and fished for barramundi. The women worked together in the community kitchen cutting up and preparing vegetables.



Desley Thompson, Director of Services, RAATSICC, and a member of SNAICC's National Executive

They were all very happy to do that."

"We had none of your hot chips or fast food. It was all vegetables, fish and meat cooked traditionally. The community works together to prepare and enjoy the feast."

### Ceremonial activities are important

When working with Torres Strait Islander communities, it's very important to be sensitive to the communities' ceremonial activities and the duties and needs of people participating in them. One example is with bereavement protocols.

As Desley points out, "Island culture is very similar to Aboriginal culture with the importance of ceremonial activities, especially around 'Sorry Business' (the death of someone)."

"When there is a bereavement, there are very, very strict grieving protocols, especially around using the name of those who have passed away."

"In some communities, the protocols involve members staying in their houses for two days, or even up to a week, when someone passes away. They may only leave when the eldest woman in the family comes to get you from your house."

"When visiting a community to run an activity you need to ensure you are familiar with the protocols, and find out what's happening in the community before you go. Be sensitive to the community's needs when you're visiting, and be prepared to incorporate what the community wants as you go along," Desley says.

"Have trust in our community people. If you're visiting a community and you're waiting to be seen by someone and you don't immediately know what's going on at the time, they will know what's happening. Something may have happened overnight or even just an hour ago. Be patient and always follow protocol when visiting a community."



PERSPECTIVE

Photo courtesy of Kaltie Tabuai © Kaltie Tabuai



## Raising and educating kids the Torres Strait way

Father and trainee teacher Kaltie Tabuai shares his perspective on being a Torres Strait Islander father and education in the Torres Strait.

The joys of bringing up children in the Torres Strait far outweigh the challenges. With its isolation – be it the distance from general urbanised ‘luxuries’ or geography, especially now due to the virtual non-existence of a commercial airline – it can seem a day to day grind. The flip side (and you have to always look on the bright side of life) first and foremost is I am thankful for the gifts that my children are.

Being a part of their journey of discovery of life’s mysteries, joys and struggles – my partner, Veronica, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. Mind you, with the idyllic Torres Strait as a backdrop, “why worry, just wait and see what the next tide’ll bring in” is easily the recommended mentality to have.

It was against much advice that we relocated up here from down south. “The

education there leaves a lot to be desired” was the main concern of our advisers. But you make the best of a situation by creating your own solutions. Time consuming? Yes, but each child is an individual anyway and time needs to be expended to ensure the shoe fits. I therefore endeavoured to support and understand the education process for myself – to the point of taking on the challenges of studying a Bachelor of Education. What my partner and I perceive important is our culture in its own element: the environment. For one is derived from the other, contributing to its unique attributes. You can energise the existence of a culture but it’s at ‘home’ that it thrives.

In my conversation with a local artist, we nattered on the impacts of time on our region, specifically the importance education institutions in our community grant to the

maintenance of culture. We also analysed the dugong herd structure and found parallels to the essence of Torres Strait communal existence.

A dugong herd, for example, has individuals that exhibit specialised behaviour that helps the immediate ‘community’, and a strong, committed leader is one that most dugong hunters would gratefully let pass. This structure affords a mother and infant protection in the company of the herd. The mother nurtures the baby, teaching it the perils of the open water in the relative safety of the shallows and extended ‘family’.

In today’s society, irrespective of geographic location, and like for the dugong of this region, the perils are ever present. Safe navigation through these perils is our responsibility as parents; we consider this a privilege. By helping to secure the merger of two cultures, yet leaving the final make-up of this merger to the children themselves, we grant them ownership of their own destiny.

The Torres Strait, as any environment, is full of nature’s lessons that warrant consideration and with the availability of living encyclopaedias you are never lost. The children are happy and we hope the experience will afford them familiarity and confidence to embrace and respect any culture. For me, I have to offer them the world from the foundations of my strength: my culture.

**Kaltie Tabuai** (pictured above with his kids) lives on Kubin Island. He’s a fourth year Remote Area Teacher Education (Bachelor of Education) student with James Cook University and volunteers at Kubin Campus of Tagai State College. He’s President of the Parent & Citizens Association and a community representative on the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Regional Education Committee (TSIAREC).

Photo by May Kabay © May Kabay 2007



## Torres Strait Islander tombstone unveiling

The tombstone unveiling a very important Torres Strait Islander ceremony that marks the completion of the tombstone of a deceased loved one. It is usually performed about a year after the loss of a family member, but it depends on the family.

The ceremony marks the final resting place or ‘home’ for the loved one, and represents the family’s final good-bye to their lost family member.

The gravesite is extensively decorated for the day, and after many days preparation, the ceremony lasts a whole day and ends with feasting and traditional dancing. There is a big gathering of families to celebrate.

The tombstone unveiling is a solemn occasion, with traditional singing and Christian prayers and hymns, but the rest of the ceremony is a celebration. While it can be a distressing time for the family as they revisit

the loss of that loved one, the family is satisfied as they have built the home for the deceased and shown their respect.

**By May Kabay, Service Communication and Information Project Officer, IPSU Queensland, Townsville**

IPSU Queensland has lots of resources and information on how children services can support Torres Strait Islander children and families. Telephone 1800 110 869, email [ipsu@ipsu.com.au](mailto:ipsu@ipsu.com.au) or go online: [www.ipsu.com.au](http://www.ipsu.com.au)





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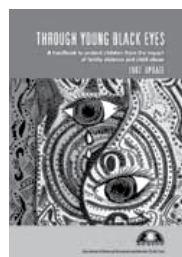
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32 page DL full colour booklet

&

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Publisher: SNAICC

**Cost: free to foster carers,**

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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](mailto:publications@snaicc.asn.au)



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