



2011 SNAICC AGM and Members Forum: Pages 13–16

Time to stand up for Victorian Charter of Human Rights

The Victorian Government is poised to release its response to a parliamentary committee report that recommended weakening the protections contained in the state's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The September 2011 report, by the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee (SARC) also opposed the inclusion of further provisions, such as the right to self-determination.

Enacted in 2006, the charter outlines the rights, freedoms and responsibilities that belong to all Victorians and must be applied across almost all areas of government activity.

The charter must be considered when new legislation is introduced into the Victorian Parliament; in the activities and decisions of public authorities such as police, local councils and state government departments; and when courts are applying Victorian laws.

The charter also specifically protects the distinct cultural rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria.

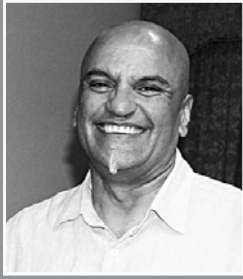
SNAICC National Executive member and CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association, Muriel Bamblett, called on Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu to strengthen the charter to ensure the rights and future of Aboriginal peoples and children.

"In the VACCA submission to SARC, we suggested that the charter should include specific protections for Aboriginal communities on the basis of their status as First Peoples and their rights to self-determination," Muriel said.

"We also believe that children's rights should be included with a priority given to the protection of children's rights to identity, culture and connection to family and community as being in the best interests of the child."

Muriel said the Premier, in a major Closing the Gap speech in March 2011, had emphasised the need to promote the aspirations of Aboriginal Victorians, improve mutual accountability between Aboriginal communities and the State Government, encourage a partnership approach across all sectors of the

Continued on page 3



frankly speaking

2012 promises to be a productive year, in which we build on a number of important government initiatives that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Some of these include the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, the Closing the Gap policy, the National Standards for Out of Home Care, the Early Years Learning Framework, and child protection reforms in the Northern Territory and New South Wales.

I believe the next three years will bring much more tangible outcomes based on

the foundations that have been laid.

SNAICC is well-placed to get our agenda on the table. Our main policy directions for 2012 include continuing to advocate for strong and focused outcomes of the National Framework plan of the Protection of Australia's children; and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in all jurisdictions.

We will also advocate for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused services within the new National Quality Standard in the early childhood education and care sector. And we will continue to promote the need for strong and well-resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services that are community owned and driven.

We also want to advocate and support strong cultural competency practice in children and family services (see page 4 of this newsletter) as well as workforce development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

Over the years, SNAICC has built a proud reputation for producing

valuable information resources for children and family services — and 2012 will be no different.

In 2012, SNAICC will also work on securing philanthropic funds as a way of diversifying our income streams.

The success of SNAICC's role as a peak body — across its policy, advocacy and resources work — rests on having a strong and diverse membership.

This is partly why the SNAICC National Executive has decided to reduce our fees for full and affiliate members (see article below).

We're looking forward to busy 12 months in which we continue being effective at raising the issues that matter to our members.

We wish all our members, partners and supporters a happy and productive 2012.

Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO
frank@snaicc.asn.au

We've reduced our membership fees!

The SNAICC National Executive has decided to reduce the annual fee for SNAICC full and affiliate members.

The full membership fee has been cut from \$300 to \$200 for large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and from \$150 to \$75 for smaller agencies. The annual fee for affiliate members has been reduced from \$120 to \$100.

SNAICC full members enjoy a number of benefits, including participation at the Members Forum (as part of the Annual General Meeting) and free access to our publications and resource materials.

There has never been a better or more important time to become a member — and help SNAICC in speaking up strongly for our children and families.

SNAICC members are our first point of contact for feedback and contribute to the development of our policies and resources.

For more information on the various levels of SNAICC membership, contact our Membership Officer, Sandy Barber, on (03) 9489 8099.

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Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this publication may contain images of people who may have since passed away.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights should be strengthened, not watered down

Continued from page 1

community and improve inclusiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Mr Baillieu also requested that all Victorian departments produce an Aboriginal inclusion plan to improve the access to services and programs and provide culturally safe places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” Muriel said.

“If the Baillieu Government is serious about inclusion and reconciliation, it should look to bolster the charter with references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s right to self-determination so we can exercise more control over the future of our communities, families and children.”

“Human rights is a basis for respectful relationships and can also be a foundation for addressing disadvantage — through freedom and empowerment, not paternalism.”

Muriel said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — in fact all Victorians — at the very least must resist attempts to water down the Charter of Human Rights. Weakening the charter would represent an attack on basic human rights in Victoria.

In December 2011, SNAICC published a briefing paper on the Victorian Charter of Human Rights (available online at www.snaicc.asn.au).

The paper overviews the charter’s operation, how the charter has been used to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues since 2006, and the current review process.

The SNAICC paper also identifies some possibilities for using the charter to advance our children’s rights in Victoria.

The paper notes that community support for the charter, as shown through submissions to SARC, was overwhelmingly high.

The Human Rights Law Centre found that of the 3834 submissions provided to SARC, 95 per cent supported retaining or strengthening the charter while just



Muriel Bamblett: a strong charter could ensure the rights and future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Victoria.

five per cent supported weakening or repealing the charter.

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is the only other jurisdiction to have a Human Rights Charter. It is a similarly invaluable tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT to rally use in their battles for change.

For people in other states and NT, it may be an opportune time to reopen discussions about establishing a Human Rights Charter in their jurisdiction. This remains particularly relevant given the recent rejection of a Human Rights Act

by the Australian Government.

The Victorian Government’s formal response to the SARC report is due by March 2012. Mr Baillieu has said the views expressed in the SARC report are “not necessarily those of the Coalition Government”.

Now is the time to tell Premier Baillieu that you support the current important protections in the state’s Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities!

Go to the charter briefing paper on the SNAICC website for details on how to contact the Victorian Premier.

Report on constitutional reform

The expert panel on constitutional reform has handed its final report to Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

The panel has recommended repealing sections 25 and 51 (xxvi), the so-called ‘race’ provisions, in the Constitution.

It has called for new powers to be inserted to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, to make positive laws with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to prohibit all discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic or national origin.

The panel’s suggested changes would also recognise the prior occupation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their continuing relationship with their traditional lands and waters,

and their languages as being the original Australian languages.

The panel expressed confidence that its recommendations “are capable gaining the overwhelming public support needed to succeed at a referendum.”

It warned that if the referendum was rejected by the Australian people, “the consequences of failure would be damaging to the nation”.

SNAICC welcomed the panel’s proposals, but is disappointed they do not include recognition of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For more information on SNAICC’s response, see the ‘news and events’ section on our website.

Mansell calls for major constitutional changes — Page 16

The need for cultural proficiency in children's services



Major research over the past decade — including by Saul Flaxman at the University of NSW and Judy Trigwell for the WA Council of Social Service — identifies cultural proficiency as one of the key areas for increasing service engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Increased engagement in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is critical in light of, among other factors, well-documented evidence that:

- early childhood educational and developmental outcomes are lower for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children than for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Nguyen, DEEWR Briefing Paper 2010; Russell and Wenham, Menzies Centre for Health Policy 2010)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have a significantly lower participation rate in ECEC services than other children in Australia (Productivity Commission, Early Childhood Development Workforce Report, 2011), and
- the introduction of children's participation in quality, culturally-inclusive and relevant early childhood education and care services leads to better longer term outcomes in a range of developmental areas. (COAG National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development)

Drawing from a literature review and consultations with mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

ECEC services, SNAICC has developed three core principles that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural proficiency in ECEC service delivery.

1. We respect, support and incorporate cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including language and traditions, in ECEC service delivery.
2. We understand that culture is embedded in all that we do and don't do, and acknowledge the privilege granted to the dominant culture.
3. We engage in positive, mutually-supportive and equal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and organisations.

These principles can be used to support services identify important focus areas to understand and strengthen their cultural proficiency, and to "unpack" the broad scope of government policy in this area and identify any gaps.

Clear opportunities exist with the introduction of the National Quality Standard (NQS) and within that the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for strengthening cultural proficiency in the sector, which SNAICC believes are not currently being fully realised. This issue is explored further below.

The principles may also be used to explore the comprehensiveness of cultural proficiency within different programs such as the EYLF and could be mapped against resources, training

and practices to support practice development in the sector.

SNAICC recently consulted with a range of diverse ECEC services on issues around developing culturally proficient practices (see panel on page 5).

While these consultations have many policy and practice implications, this update explores the inclusion of cultural competency within the National Quality Standard being rolled out across Australia from early 2012.

The National Quality Framework (NQF), jointly developed by the Australian Government, states and territories through COAG, forms part of a broader agenda to reform education, skills and early childhood development.

It commences in a staggered approach to some ECEC services in January 2012, aiming to "build a high quality, integrated quality system including accreditation, for early learning and care that takes account of setting, diversity of service delivery, and the age and stage of development of children." (Early Development Steering Committee, 2009)

The NQF will introduce the new National Quality Standard and a new ratings system with which services will need to comply. (Early Childhood Development Sub-group, 2008)

The NQS will not apply to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, a fact which the Productivity Commission has warned is only likely to exacerbate the gap between the quality of mainstream

services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. (Productivity Commission, Early Childhood Development Workforce Report, 2011)

In line with the Productivity Commission, SNAICC advocates strongly for the inclusion of these services within the NQS, through a plan with agreed targets and additional funding to ensure the necessary support to enable their compliance. (Productivity Commission, 2011)

The term cultural competency is not defined clearly in the NQS. However, it is linked to certain NQS quality area requirements, with use of terms such as “cultural diversity” and “difference”. Quality Area elements that involve cultural competency demands are:

- a) programs are informed by cultural diversity (Quality Area 1)
- b) staff acknowledge, value and respect diversity and difference (Quality Area 4), and
- c) services are to: respect parents’ values and beliefs about child rearing; participate in the community in ways that respect families and communities; and have a policy about inclusion and procedures for reducing discrimination (Quality Area 6).

All Quality Area elements in the NQS must be met to achieve a rating of National Quality Standard or higher. However, as highlighted by the Productivity Commission, further efforts are required to develop a clear definition of cultural competency and measurement frameworks to ensure that “ECEC services must meet cultural competency standards to receive National Quality Standard endorsement.” (Productivity Commission, 2011)

Cultural competency is also not integrated across all quality areas, including areas where understanding “cultural diversity” and “difference” may be directly relevant.

SNAICC advocates for a definition and measurement frameworks which are specific, outcome-based and developed in consultation with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in order to ensure that they reflect real cultural competency in practice.

Advancing cultural proficiency through the NQS also requires retaining Abori-

SNAICC consults with ECEC services

SNAICC recently consulted with a diverse range of ECEC services on issues around developing culturally-proficient practices, and challenges and opportunities in achieving cultural proficiency. Some key findings from the consultations were:

- All services conduct some activities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity through the use of language and traditional images, posters and celebrations, and see relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as a key aspect of effective service delivery.
- Most services experience barriers in accessing resources and knowledges, including not knowing protocols, being afraid of doing the wrong thing, lack of local resources and lack of knowledge of where to access resources. Services also experienced limitations in programming for cultural identity and barriers in connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and Elders. Services are motivated to overcome these barriers.
- Most services apply some forms of self-reflective practice and recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have different needs. Some services do, however, continue to demonstrate a lack of cultural understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

- No service had cultural proficiency training and only one service had an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency focused policy (although most did have anti-bias and anti-discrimination policies). No service interviewed used a cultural competency framework to develop their cultural proficiency or have evaluated their cultural proficiency.

It emerged clearly from these consultations that most services meet some aspects of the core cultural proficiency principles and show a clear commitment to improving and embedding cultural proficiency in a practical way, expressing a need for greater support to achieve this.

Services interviewed found that the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language creates positive relations with families and celebrating cultural events provides a sense of safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Community-controlled services reiterated the importance of involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, families and Elders from the community for cultural guidance.

Many services also placed an emphasis on the EYLF as a guiding document that will bring a sense of safety and belonging to all children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

ginal and Torres Strait Islander NQS assessors, and ensuring non-Indigenous assessors have strong cultural proficiency to work with and properly assess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and services servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Clear standards within the NQS assessment tool, as well as support processes and training for Aboriginal focused services to develop a culturally safe service are important aspects to realise cultural proficiency of services for our children.

Various strategies that SNAICC recommends to support services build culturally proficient practice include:

- mapping cultural proficiency components of trainings for ECEC services
- providing cultural competency protocols, templates and practice focused resources to assist services to embed cultural competency training and practice within their services

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The EYLF: what does it mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services?

In 2009 the Council of Australian Governments approved the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), a key aspect of the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care (ECEC). The EYLF will be incorporated into the National Quality Standard — the new benchmark for quality in early childhood services — which took effect on 1 January 2012.

According to the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the EYLF has been included “in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions.”

The EYLF focuses on supporting children’s learning and development from birth to five years, containing key principles, practices and outcomes considered essential in this process.

With a strong focus on play-based learning, DEEWR says the framework also highlights the importance of “communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development.”

The EYLF “guides educators in their curriculum decision-making, and assists in planning, implementing and evaluating quality in early childhood settings. It also underpins the implementation of more specific curriculum relevant to each local community and early childhood setting.”

What impact will the EYLF have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services?

The National Quality Framework (NQF) took effect in most mainstream ECEC services on 1 January 2012. Services will now be regularly assessed on their compliance under the NQF, including their implementation of an approved learning framework (such as the EYLF).

While Budget Based Funding (BBF) services — the majority of Aboriginal

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services initially will not be included under the new National Quality Standard — it is vital that our services are not left behind.

and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services — will initially not be included under the scope of the NQF, the hope is that they will move towards inclusion before the review of the NQF in 2014.

As a key component of the NQF, the EYLF marks an important new development for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC sector. It is vital that our services are not left behind, that they are supported to both grow and develop under the new Framework and Quality System, that the new system is developed in a way that is consistent with and reflective of the meaning of quality for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, and that services have opportunities to demonstrate how they are applying it.

Given its non-prescriptive nature and focus on intentional teaching and reflective practice, many see the EYLF as a valuable opportunity both to improve service practice, and to demonstrate and be recognised for existing good practice.

In 2010, Yorganop Indigenous Professional Support Unit (based in Perth) noted that the EYLF “gives opportunity to validate in a formal framework many of the current practices already happening in our services. It is a case of fitting programs and planning into the outcomes and therefore recognising current good practice where it already exists.” (SNAICC News, May 2010)

Good practice principles for ECEC service delivery

SNAICC is currently conducting research on how, through implementation of the EYLF, community-controlled ECEC services support good outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

While a significant gap still exists in the accessibility of ECEC services for our children, there is a strong history and a breadth of evidence to draw upon of excellent ECEC service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

SNAICC has identified four good practice principles that, evidence indicates, underpin effective early childhood services for our children, families and communities. These are:

Innovative governance strategies — community control of services

Community-controlled services are based in and governed by an Aboriginal and-or Torres Strait Islander community. Research demonstrates that community control can lead to increased community and family participation in the service, increased service sustainability due to longer-term community engagement, and improved quality and responsiveness of the service. It can also help to overcome negative associations some community and family members may have with mainstream services.

An empowering culture

Services that have an empowering culture build on family and community strengths. They incorporate and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and child-rearing practices, and therefore increase families’ confidence and capabilities to support their children’s development. They also help to ensure continuity and stability between children’s experiences at home and at the service.

Fostering identity and culture

Fostering identity and culture within a service provides a link between home

Continued on next page

and the service, and aids children's transition to school. It helps children to feel pride and a strong sense of identity in their culture. Such services consult with family, community and elders, they embrace local culture, history and languages, and are often more successful at recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, which has been demonstrated to be an important factor in increasing families' participation in ECEC services.

Holistic and responsive service delivery

Services that are holistic offer a range of services, and can therefore increase children and families' access to health, nutrition, parenting and other vital programs. They consider and view the child within the context of the family and community, and are therefore better able to respond to their individual needs. Responsive services are also tailored to the needs of the local community, and have flexible entry points, ensuring that they are both relevant and accessible.

However, while there is strong anecdotal evidence for why these principles lead to good practice and improved outcomes for children, there



Undoonoo Child Care Centre (MACS), Woorabinda, Qld

has been little real evidence-based examination of "why and how".

SNAICC's research will therefore focus on tangible examples of service practices that embody these principles, and implement the EYLF to produce outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We will explore what is unique about services that are demonstrating good outcomes and draw out implications for other services and for policy development.

SNAICC's research will continue until the end of May 2012. If you have comments or suggestions please contact Holly Mason-White (holly@snaicc.asn.au).

We're especially keen to hear about useful resources, training and experiences in implementing the EYLF in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service.

For more information on the EYLF, visit: www.deewr.gov.au and follow the links under Early Childhood.

Productivity Commission releases early childhood report

The Productivity Commission recently released a report examining workforce issues in the early childhood development sector (see www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/education-workforce/early-childhood/report).

SNAICC supports the robust recommendations for improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, key highlights of which are set out below.

However, SNAICC remains concerned that the report failed to give sufficient attention to certain key points, including the importance of community control over services targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The National Quality Standard: SNAICC strongly supports the Commission's recommendation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services be included in the new National Quality Standard (NQS) before the 2014 review.

It suggests that this be done through a structured plan with agreed targets

and increased allocation of funding to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services are enabled to meet the NQS. As the commission rightly recognises, the current exclusion of these services will only lead to a widening of the gap between the quality of mainstream services and those provided specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Cultural competency: The Productivity Commission report confirms the need for a stronger definition of cultural proficiency in the NQS, as well as measuring standards for assessment, achieved through clear and effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency guidelines, and ensuring NQS assessors are appropriately skilled to assess cultural competency. SNAICC also stresses the importance of recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessors.

Funding: The report concludes that current funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services

is inadequate and that funding arrangements are hindering effective workforce planning. It recommends: more workers and more highly skilled workers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services; Government prioritisation of quality ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — without passing on the cost to parents; and multiple-year funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused ECEC services.

Workforce development: The report addresses a number of important ECEC workforce development concerns, including: development of a coordinated workforce strategy to prioritise placing suitably qualified staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused services; more flexible employment arrangements to attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and additional funding for IPSUs to provide cultural competency training and other professional development and support services.

SNAICC National Executive member tells conference:

Good services, not our families, are hard to reach



Lisa Coulson: "If we get this right for our families now, if we get this right for our children, then the outcomes will continue to develop for generations."

SNAICC National Executive member Lisa Coulson gave the keynote address at the *Honouring the Child, Honouring Equity* Conference, hosted by the University of Melbourne's Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood on 19 November.

A palawa woman who has been director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA) for 19 years, Lisa told her audience the common view of mainstream service providers was that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were "hard to reach".

This was a misconception, she argued.

Rather, the onus was on mainstream services to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, in accordance with meeting the enshrined rights of Aboriginal children. This could best be done through *holistic* and *culturally appropriate* programs.

According to Lisa, early childhood service delivery is holistic when it evaluates client needs comprehensively, taking into account social, cultural and economic factors.

Programs and services can then be designed to meet the specific needs of

the client, and link the child's needs with the whole family, the whole community and the relationships between them.

Lisa outlined the multiple barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in accessing support services.

"The barriers are historical, cultural, social and practical," she said.

"They include: a lack of cultural awareness in the provision of services and as a result, services that are not culturally appropriate; the history of mainstream services in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and resulting distrust of the service provider; a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed by the service provider; and language and communication barriers.

"Significant practical barriers include low income; remote or regional location and lack of transport.

"These barriers may present as an unwillingness to engage with the service, but should rather be recognised as barriers that services must address in order to respond appropriately to the needs of our communities."



SNAICC's three core principles for cultural proficiency

Principle 1:

We support, respect and incorporate cultural identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including language and traditions, in the delivery of early childhood education and care services.

Principle 2:

We understand that culture is embedded in all that we do and don't do, and acknowledge the privilege granted to the dominant culture.

Principle 3:

We engage in positive, mutually-supportive and equal partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and organisations.

Lisa emphasised the centrality of culture in the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"To ensure that our children grow up strong in their culture and identity, we need to create early childhood education environments which

“We must not blame the victims of social injustice for the failings of our services to respond to their realities of disadvantage.”

celebrate, nurture and affirm their cultural identity,” she said.

Lisa argued the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were better met through culturally appropriate service provision.

However, community-controlled services such as Multifunctional Aboriginal Childrens Services (MACS) — which Lisa described as “the most effective and appropriate means for supporting our children, families and communities” — were not able to meet demand for their services because they were under-funded.

As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were often forced to access mainstream services.

Funding for MACS

Lisa called on government to increase funding for MACS so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families could access quality, culturally proficient services which met their needs holistically.

While the main function of MACS centres was child care, Lisa said they provided a holistic service that included mobile outreach programs, wellbeing programs for families and children, cultural awareness programs and parenting programs.

Lisa argued mainstream services needed to make a “significant commitment to change” to become genuinely culturally safe and culturally proficient when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Lisa argued a key aspect of this challenge involved partnerships in which mainstream organisations respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s right to self-determination and recognised their strengths.

Currently, positive relationships were being hampered by a “lack of value and respect for our community-controlled services, for the strengths of our culture, and the potential of our community-led and managed solutions to address the needs of our children and families”.

Such partnerships, and their role in fostering holistic and culturally-appropriate service delivery, were “vital” in organisations no longer placing the blame on Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander families for being “hard to reach”.

“We must not blame the victims of social injustice for the failings of our services to respond to their realities of disadvantage,” Lisa said.

“I believe that by working with respect and in genuine partnership with Aboriginal families we can build the capacity of families and communities and work to address the multiple disadvantages they experience.

“If we get this right for our families now, if we get this right for our children, then the outcomes will continue to develop for generations.”

Lisa’s speech is available at:
www.snaicc.asn.au/policy-advocacy

What is holistic service delivery?

Holistic programs:

- **are child centred, family-centred, collaborative, culturally-inclusive, focused on the needs of whole community and strong in respectful and trusting relationships between staff and families, and other organisations including mainstream organisations**
- **are culturally appropriate services in a culturally safe environment, so that our children will develop a positive sense of self and feel a strong pride in their Aboriginality**
- **place the child within the wider context, acknowledging the importance of family and community well-being in achieving positive outcomes for children**
- **place culture at the forefront of developing a strong sense of identity, and allow children to be supported in achieving emotional, social, educational and spiritual wellbeing**
- **are strengths-based, that is, they value already existing strengths of family, community and culture, and work to enhance skills and family functioning**
- **are, where possible, staffed and managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**
- **respond specifically to identified community needs, and address all aspects of child development, child safety and parenting skills, and**
- **are sustainable, enabling life-changing outcomes that will impact not only on this generation, but on the next.**

National approach to planning transition from out-of-care to independence

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–20 has developed a national approach to ensure young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence are provided with consistent planning, no matter where they live.

According to the National Framework Implementation Group, the planning approach has been developed to align with the National Standards for out-of-home care.

In a paper co-published with FaHCSIA, the group notes that each state and territory has its own legislative and policy framework to support young people transitioning from out-of-home care.

The national approach aims to improve consistency, better link all the existing supports and services, coordinate

planning and implementation and improve information sharing.

The group says achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people transitioning from care to independence “requires a specific focus including careful consideration in establishing support systems.”

“Family, community and cultural connections are vital for the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

“The cultural sensitivity of child protection workers during what can be an intense, emotional and difficult process is important in ensuring a smooth transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.”

The latest report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (January 2012) reveals Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continued to be over-represented within the child protection system in 2010-11.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 7.6 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be the subject of

a child protection substantiation, and 10 times as likely to be in out-of-home care.

In an August 2011 submission, SNAICC maintained that this gross misrepresentation requires specific focus, not only in prevention and management of out-of-home care, but in establishing support systems for youth to transition from out-of-home care to independence.

SNAICC urged that the importance of connection to culture by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth be more strongly reflected in the national approach to planning.

The Australian Government, state and territory governments and NGOs, through the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Well-being of Australia's Children, worked together to deliver the national approach, which is informed by evidence supporting ‘best practice’.

SNAICC's submission on planning is available on our website; and the group paper at www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/ncalc_rpt/Pages/default.aspx

The need for cultural proficiency in children's services

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- promoting good practices that uphold cultural proficiency principles and utilise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges
- developing a clearinghouse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, resources, posters, books and puzzles to support staff in program development and delivery, and
- targeted research into how cultural proficiency principles align with the NQF, and in particular the NQS, and how to bridge any gaps, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targeted services.

SNAICC also calls for further research to develop a specific national cultural competency framework to guide the cultural proficiency of the ECEC sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and people. The Early

Years Learning Framework, a guide for early childhood educators included under Quality Area 1 of the NQS, does contain some cultural competency components.

One EYLF practice requires educators to be culturally competent and respect multiple ways of knowing, seeing and living. While this can be seen as the beginning of developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific cultural proficient practice when working with and caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and peoples, it provides only general guidance, as it is not specifically focused on cultural proficiency to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

It is also not clear that the application of the EYLF is mandatory, application of other approved frameworks also suffice. A national cultural competency

framework could sit within the EYLF as a stand-alone document, so that it receives sufficient attention and is accessible.

The NQF, and in particular the EYLF, provide a perfect opportunity to further develop, support, recognise and enforce culturally proficient practice within both mainstream and non-mainstream services. SNAICC believes that this would significantly increase the accessibility of ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and ultimately development outcomes for our children.

SNAICC considers it critical therefore that we take action now to ensure that the current opportunities are used to maximise this potential.

For more information, contact Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Policy and Research Manager (emmas@snaicc.asn.au).



Main photo: Children at the Wyndham community in WA's East Kimberley.

Below right: Artist Doreen Long with her painting "WELA Mob", about the project at Wyndham.

Photos courtesy of Clare Alcock.

Partnership

builds on strengths at Wyndham

SNAICC has been undertaking a project to learn about genuine and respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and mainstream organisations and what makes them work.

In late 2011 SNAICC staff visited the Aboriginal-run Wyndham Early Learning Activity (WELA) in Western Australia's East Kimberley to learn about the work that WELA has been doing in partnership with Save the Children.

WELA started as a community initiative for young mothers and babies at the recreation centre in Wyndham. The mums felt that mainstream services weren't meeting their needs and were getting together regularly, using whatever resources they could to build capacity for themselves and their children.

Save the Children became involved in 2005 through the Australian Government program, Communities for Children.

Save the Children partnered with Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation in Wyndham to fund and support the development of WELA.

Since this time WELA has evolved from a playgroup to an incorporated and

independent broader service with activities including: focused learning for children with their mums, health and nutrition support, transition to school support, a breakfast club, a women's centre and men's groups.

WELA Coordinator, Jane Parker, explains that WELA's growth has been made possible through the partnership: "If Save the Children had not come in, there would not be the family engagement... there would not be WELA. They took a chance on a fledgling group. This has been a massive change for our sustainability and capacity for service outcomes."

Anthea Whan of Save the Children explains that working in partnership with WELA is about helping WELA to meet their objectives and not about the growth of Save the Children. Anthea says that the approach is to take WELA's lead, build on the strengths of the young mums' group and make clear to WELA what Save the Children can do to assist.

Jane believes that, in partnership with Save the Children, WELA has been able to pursue its own priorities and respond to the needs of families in Wyndham. In the partnership WELA makes clear that everything should be relevant to the



community, the programs must be flexible, WELA needs to grow to provide holistic services and local leadership is key.

A focus on building relationships of trust is important to make the partnership work. Save the Children has established a presence in the community, given time to the relationship and been patient to wait for the community to express their needs.

WELA recognises that Save the Children value their perspective and what they contribute to the partnership. They can raise concerns with no fear that funding will be withdrawn because of what is said.

The partnership has made a significant contribution to build capacity for WELA. This has included support with the

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SNAICC adds its voice to calls for a children's commissioner

SNAICC has put its case forward for the creation of a National Children's Commissioner in a submission to the Australian Government in December 2011.

SNAICC considers the creation of a national commissioner as critical to improve human rights outcomes for children and young people, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

SNAICC's submission endorses and complements an NGO Sector Position Paper on the topic also submitted to the Government in December 2011.

SNAICC is part of the NGO Group, led by UNICEF, Save the Children and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, that developed the paper on agreed issues concerning the roles and functions of a National Children's Commissioner.

SNAICC also advocates for a Deputy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner within the office of the National Children's Commissioner.

Among the reasons why SNAICC considers this to be such an important aspect for inclusion are:

- the unique rights and status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as the First Peoples of Australia require a separate mandate and focus
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth continue to experience systemic and structural discrimination, and disadvantage
- while huge amounts of energy and resources are being invested in responding to disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, such as Closing the Gap, attention is required to ensure these initiatives are redressing the causes behind the issues and that they are implemented in a manner that enables results
- Aboriginal leadership is critical to a strengths-based approach of advocacy and support for Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

- evidence demonstrates that participation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is integral to advance issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities
- state experience with children's commissioners highlights a need for a specific mandate contained within the enabling legislation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and
- the support that exists for recognition of specific focus on Indigenous children in recent international experience.

SNAICC suggests the creation of a working group of practitioners to look at how an effective Deputy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner position could be established under enabling legislation.

The NGO position paper outlines 13 principles that would guide the work of a National Children's Commissioner. Under some of these principles, the commissioner should:

- act independently of government
- ensure the meaningful participation of children and young people in all aspects of the role
- have a mandate based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant human rights instruments
- coordinate with other relevant bodies to avoid duplication of function and to identify failure of collective or particular government responsibility
- have a specific mandate to protect and advocate for the rights of all vulnerable children and young people in Australia, and
- give special recognition to the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as the First Peoples of Australia.

SNAICC's submission and the NGO Sector Position Paper are available on our website: snaicc.asn.au

Partnership
builds on
strengths

Continued from page 11

process of incorporation, developing policies and procedures and strengthening financial management.

Save the Children has supported WELA to obtain other sources of funding and lobbied funding bodies on their behalf. They have contributed to professional development for staff through training and also mutual mentoring roles between staff of WELA and Save the Children.

WELA has helped to build the cultural competency of Save the Children and connect them with the local community. There have been challenges in the relationship, but WELA believes that over time Save the Children have improved their approach, developed an appropriate team and built strong relationships.

Efforts by Save the Children to develop the cultural awareness of staff and the employment of local Aboriginal staff by Save the Children have been vital to the partnership.

Jane explains that one of the most important successes of WELA and their partnership with Save the Children has been the empowerment of community members: "I have only Aboriginal staff at the moment and that is because they are good. They are part of the success of WELA, their personal growth as community women. The building of their skills and confidence is enormous."

WELA Chairperson, Estelle Hunter, describes the success of WELA for the children: "The kids in WELA are a step ahead of the rest. School becomes easy for them, their reading levels are high, their behaviour is good, they know what to do and they do it. They interact well with other kids. They are more independent. The kids share. They are more confident."

A case study that profiles the partnership between WELA and Save the Children is available on the SNAICC website — www.snaicc.asn.au



SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam told the 2011 AGM and Members Forum in Launceston in late November the past year had presented several challenges and new opportunities for SNAICC in its role as a strong national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

"At the heart of these challenges and opportunities is the quest to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control and participation in the crucial issues that impact on our children and families," Dawn said.

A major policy issue in 2011 was advocating on the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle — a central and defining issue for SNAICC.

"Since 2001, the number of our children not placed with relatives or another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander care giver has more than tripled," Dawn said.

"So it seems the battle to prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being taken away from their families is far from over."

In 2011 SNAICC also continued to promote support for Multifunctional Aboriginal Children Services, whose funding remains inadequate despite being recognised as the best child care model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC appraised progress and lobbied extensively on the 38 Indigenous Children and Family Centres (CFCs) across Australia, including the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultation and participation.

SNAICC is concerned that a lack of clarity in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control over the development, design and service delivery of these children and family centres will fundamentally compromise the ability of CFCs to meet their objectives.

These objectives include improving access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to suitable and



A busy and challenging year ends — and another one begins

culturally-inclusive early childhood and family support services.

In 2011, SNAICC continued to support the critical efforts of the Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs) across Australia to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services, ensuring quality, culturally safe care that meets the needs of our children and families.

Dawn said SNAICC was advocating for ongoing support for the IPSU model into the new three-year service period starting in July 2012.

Among exciting new opportunities in 2011, SNAICC is exploring effective partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and mainstream agencies in developing and delivering children and family services.

"Our families often need to access mainstream services — so we have to ensure appropriate services are delivered to meet their needs," Dawn said.

"Genuine and respectful partnerships provide an opportunity for mutual capacity-building that increases the cultural competency of mainstream services and builds the governance and service capacity of our community-controlled services."

SNAICC is researching and highlighting practices that contribute to the fostering of partnerships that strengthen the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, build on our communities' strengths in caring for children and improve support for our families.

The new peak body for Aboriginal children and families in the Northern Territory — part of major reforms to the NT's child protection system — also represented a significant and exciting milestone.

Dawn said the peak body, which is called Strong Aboriginal Families, Together or SAFT (pronounced 'safety'), was long overdue.

Once up and running, SAFT will be an Aboriginal community-controlled agency representing and advocating on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about culturally-appropriate models of child protection and family wellbeing policies, programs and services in the NT.

Dawn said the SNAICC Resource Service had continued to provide great educational resources and training for children and family services.

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More information needed on national child protection plan, say members...

At the SNAICC AGM and Members Forum in Launceston from 23–24 November 2011, members were given an opportunity to discuss the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children, 2009–20 (National Framework).

A Council of Australian Governments (COAG) initiative, the National Framework is a long-term, national approach to help protect all Australian children. The National Framework's six supporting outcomes are listed on the panel on this page.

SNAICC members discussed their awareness of the National Framework and the extent to which it has impacted on the work of child and family services, NGOs working with children and families, and engagement with government departments and agencies since it came into effect in 2009.

In particular, members also discussed priorities under each of the six outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's priority plan for the next three-year period, 2012–15.

Members expressed major concerns at the lack of awareness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations about the National Framework.

One member expressed concern that the National Framework was "based on a welfare model and not on a more appropriate community development model."

However, members generally agreed the National Framework had potential

but it has the potential to make a difference.

to make a difference if it was promoted more effectively, including its connection to on-the-ground work and challenges. Many strongly related with the outcomes, saying that these reflected what they do in their services every day.

Implementation issues

Members questioned various issues around implementation of the National Framework including: how to link diverse services supporting children and families to it; how to connect such national level policy issues to implementation systems on the ground; and how to monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the National Framework.

Other prominent observations from members were:

- the National Framework should have separate outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under each of the six outcome areas
- the National Framework should include specific funding for Aboriginal programs and Torres Strait Islander programs
- funding allocations should be more specific about where money is going (for example, services, NGOs, government departments) to ensure

National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children, 2009–20

Six Supporting Outcomes

- Children live in safe and supportive families and communities.
- Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early.
- Risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed.
- Children who have been abused or neglected receive the support and care they need for their safety and wellbeing.
- Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.
- Child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevented and survivors receive adequate support.

that funding filters through to the areas intended

- the National Framework should build from the ground up; currently the approach is too bureaucratised
- the National Framework should build on what exists and support current approaches producing outcomes, such as Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), rather than trying to recreate the wheel

Continued next page

- the continuing need for national frameworks like this to move into systems and processes down the chain to enable these outcomes to be realised. For example, a “one size fits all approach” does not work for funding models, greater flexibility is necessary to be responsive to needs on the ground
- there needs to be a stronger connection between intention and outcomes, and a coherence in application across jurisdictions
- a stronger consultation process in the development of the National Framework could have assisted in building from communities and services, in getting ‘buy-in’ and in ensuring that we all move forward together, and
- moving ahead now with far more focus on practical information about the National Framework is important.

National Framework meetings

The first three-year plan under the National Framework will finish in June 2012.

SNAICC hosted a Closing the Gap Working Group meeting on 5 December 2011 to continue work on proposed priorities for the Indigenous Children Priorities Plan for the next three years.

The non-governmental working group met face to face for the first time, at The Healing Foundation in Canberra. The meeting was chaired by SNAICC CEO Frank Hytten; SNAICC National Executive member Lisa Coulson also attended as a guest.

Among some of the topics discussed at the meeting were housing, families, income support, and community control.

The National Framework Implementation Working Group (NFIWG) also met early December, in Sydney. SNAICC is an active member of the NFIWG, which meets quarterly and has a hands-on role in the implementation and delivery of the National Framework.

SNAICC will continue its work over the coming months to ensure that strong priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children are included in the next plan.

Les Malezer a guest speaker at AGM



Les Malezer (centre) with SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam and SNAICC CEO Frank Hytten.

Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples, Les Malezer, was a guest speaker at the SNAICC AGM and Members Forum in Launceston.

Les told the forum the success of Congress rested on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and individuals *wanting* to get involved in the work of the national representative body.

He said the Congress, unlike past representative/advisory bodies — including the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee, ATSIC and the National Indigenous Council — was set up as a public company “owned and operated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and representatives” and independent from government.

The national body has Australian Government funding until 2013, after which it hopes to be financially sustainable by raising funds and securing sponsorships.

Les said Congress currently had 3000 members and increasing membership was a priority. Membership is open to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals (over 18 years of age) and organisations.

“Members will decide where Congress goes as an organisation and what its roles will be,” Les said.

He said Congress is currently working

on a protocol to define its relationship with government. His personal view is that Congress should be more than an advisory body: “it should serve as a form of governance”.

Other priority issues for Congress are the reform process to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution — Les and fellow Congress co-chair, Jody Broun, are members of an expert panel set up by the Australian Government to drive consultations on the issue; and the Government’s intervention in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

The Congress is governed by an eight-member board and has three representative chambers, each consisting of 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates: Chamber One is for peak and national representative bodies; Chamber Two for organisations; and Chamber Three for individuals.

Congress has an independent Ethics Council which advises the Board and CEO on matters of best practice and integrity and can investigate breaches and complaints. The council’s work applies to all Congress officials — delegates, staff and directors.

Congress is also leading the way in gender equality by having both a male and female co-chair and mandated gender equality at all levels of the organisation.

2011: A busy and challenging year

Continued from page 13

Some of the resource service highlights were:

- another highly successful National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day on 4 August, especially the greater participation of children in the materials SNAICC produced and the wonderful national launch at Lulla's Children and Family Centre in Shepparton, Victoria
- developing a *Working and Walking Together* training package in partnership with Family Relationships Australia, around the *Working and Walking Together* manual, published by SNAICC in 2010 as a resource for Family Relationship Services to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations
- the series of *Us Young Women Matter* workshops across Australia and the national workshop in Melbourne, which brought young women together to have some fun, develop resources around being culturally strong and making good choices, and increase awareness about Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- the Child Rearing Stories project, which supports culturally-strong child rearing practices through story telling, held various workshops which led to two new books self-published by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and a new book titled *Seven Deadly Sistas* by a group of young women at Ballina (NSW)
- a project to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with a child with autism spectrum disorder, in partnership with the Parenting Research Centre.

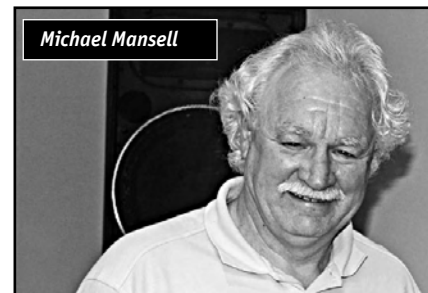
Guests at the members forum were Ms Rachel Croome and Ms Vanessa Beck from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Ms Claire Brady from the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations.

The officers told the forum of the issues and priorities of their respective departments in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services.

Members in turn were given the opportunity to discuss with the departmental officers a number of major issues and concerns at the community level.

Among major issues raised were the:

- inadequate level of current funding for Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), the long-term funding of MACS, and the current reviews being conducted of several MACS across the country
- role and functions of the 38 new Indigenous Children and Family Services being created across Australia and their relationship to MACS
- next tender model for Indigenous Professional Support Units — SNAICC is advocating for ongoing support for the IPSU model into the new three-year service period starting in July 2012
- need to provide greater support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services with the introduction of the National Quality Standard, to prevent them getting further behind and so that they can be in a position to meet the standard in the next few years
- need to effect change in mainstream children's services to make them more culturally safe and to improve the cultural proficiency of workers
- need to improve the recruitment and retainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the early childhood development sector, and
- need to strengthen compliance requirements under the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle to increase the number of children placed in Aboriginal care.



Michael Mansell

Make major changes to Constitution: Mansell

Changing Australia's Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not the time for half-hearted measures, according to Tasmanian Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell.

Michael, Legal Director at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, was a guest speaker at the SNAICC AGM and Members Forum.

Michael said the constitutional reform process was an important opportunity to fundamentally reset the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Aboriginal people and government.

He would like to see substantial changes that would recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as "sovereign people with the right to self-determination".

Reforms should look to recognise the broader collective rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples — not just as citizens, but as First Peoples with distinct rights.

Michael said the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Australia is a signatory, could be used as the basis for constitutional reform.

Article 3 of the Declaration deals with the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination, to freely determine their political status and their economic, social and cultural development.

Other articles in the Declaration deal with dispossession of land and return of land and compensation issues.

He said another possibility was to change the Constitution so that it would compel governments to seek the consent of Aboriginal and Torres

Continued on next page

Muriel Bamblett appointed to national committee to close the education gap

SNAICC National Executive member Muriel Bamblett has been appointed to the new First Peoples Education Advisory Group to provide advice to government on closing the education gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students.

The group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education experts has been appointed for a three-year term and held its first meeting with School Education Minister Peter Garrett in Canberra in December 2011.

"It's the first time in more than 20 years that an advisory body such as this has been established by a Federal Education Minister, and I look forward to working with the group and receiving its advice," Mr Garrett said.

Muriel is the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association.

In November another SNAICC National Executive member, Desley Thompson — CEO of the child care advisory body RAATSICC in Cairns — participated in the inaugural meeting of the new Children and Family Roundtable in Melbourne chaired by the Minister for Community Services Julie Collins.

The roundtable is made up of child and family experts who will guide national child and family policy development to deliver policies and programs that maximise the safety and wellbeing of children and their families.



Muriel Bamblett



Desley Thompson

Mansell calls for major constitutional changes

From page 16

Strait Islander people for actions that affected them.

Michael said recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that was confined to the preamble would be "a token gesture".

However, he said the chances of fundamental changes were remote, noting that "even some Aboriginal people don't want the big picture stuff".

In its submission on constitutional reform, SNAICC also argues for substantive changes that would entrench recognition and respect for the self-determination of the Aboriginal peoples of the land.

SNAICC supports repeal of Section 25 of the Constitution — which potentially allows states to disqualify people from

voting in state elections because of their race — and amendment to Section 51 to eliminate the potential for racial discrimination.

Among Michael's audience was Les Malezer, co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. Les and fellow Congress co-chair, Jody Broun, are ex-officio members of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Les told the audience a major focus of the panel's work was looking at ways to change the Constitution to eliminate discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the basis of race.

The panel submitted its report to the Prime Minister on 19 January 2012.



Garry Matthews holds his award, pictured with South Sydney rugby league player Ben Lowe.

Garry Matthews honoured

SNAICC National Executive member Garry Matthews won the Aboriginal Community Worker of the Year Award 2011 in recognition of his contribution to his local Coffs Harbour community.

The award is one of three annual Grace Roberts Awards that pay tribute to individuals and organisations that make a difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Coffs Harbour region (on the northern NSW coast).

Garry is the CEO of Abcare Coffs Harbour, a community-based Aboriginal organisation delivering family and social support services, and is heavily involved in the local community. He is Secretary of Coffs Harbour Community Care Options, on the local Aboriginal Interagency Committee and many other committees in the Coffs Harbour region.

Garry is also a foundation member and current Treasurer of Aboriginal Child Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec), and serves as Treasurer on the SNAICC National Executive.

Garry said he was honoured to be named Community Worker of the Year for 2011 by his peers and recognised for his work in the community.

"There are so many of us in the community that keep under the radar and just do things without expecting recognition or awards," he said.

The awards are named in honour of the late Grace Roberts, an Aboriginal woman who moved to Coffs Harbour in the 1960s and worked tirelessly for her community.

**Statement by SNAICC
Chairperson Dawn
Wallam to mark
United Nations
Human Rights Day,
10 December 2011**



We have a fundamental right to participate in decisions that impact on our children and our communities

Human Rights Day across the world on 10 December each year marks an important day to reflect on struggles for human rights of all peoples around the world.

It is also an important day for us to reflect on our progress in ensuring that, here in Australia, each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and youth is in a position to enjoy their human rights.

Human rights span the whole spectrum of our fundamental needs as human beings. They also reflect our ongoing collective struggle to choose how we, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders — as First Peoples of Australia — will lead our lives.

We have a fundamental right to participate in decisions that impact on our children and our communities, and to express our culture, to develop our culture and to raise our children in the ways of our culture.

Human rights are not things for governments to grant at will: they are entitlements that, as human beings, belong to us all.

Recent developments

Some important recent strides have been made in this area. This year has witnessed, among other notable developments:

- government agreement on national standards in out-of-home care

- the establishment of a new peak body for Aboriginal children and family interests in the Northern Territory
- a landmark agreement in NSW to transfer out-of-home care service provision to the non-government sector, and
- the first steps in a process to change Australia's Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

However, basic rights across the board remain grossly violated. Simple statistics continue to proclaim the endemic discrimination and generational trauma requiring redress.

Graphic examples of these are the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care — at around 10 times the rate of other children — and the over-representation of our children in the juvenile justice system, which runs at 24 times the rate for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Community-based solutions

Community-driven solutions work — processes that are developed, designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for our people.

Every day small changes at this level take place. In fact, so much is happening on the ground. We need to look at how government systems, services and processes can better

empower people to make these changes and to profile, resource and expand this knowledge, to enable it to transform the lives of our children and families.

The resilience, beauty, strength and wisdom of our people continue to amaze me every day. Through our collective action we can pave a way to the future we want for our children.

This is an opportune time for strong leadership in Australia, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and a change in the way we do things together.

Respectful partnerships

We are excited about building more respectful partnerships that value the role of all involved. Such equal partnerships can see better plans and systems to ensure that important initiatives, like Closing the Gap, lead to their envisaged outcomes of healthy, strong, proud and engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

These partnerships can make a difference. They can change the way we all do business.

We look forward to opportunities to work with government on significant new initiatives. The proposal for a National Children's Commissioner to champion the issues impacting children is, for example, an exciting and much-needed step to provide leadership and attention to redress systemic human rights violations impacting children across Australia.



New UN complaints protocol a boost for children's rights

SNAICC is pleased to report that a new international mechanism has been created giving children the power to submit complaints about abuses of their rights — putting them on an equal footing with adults.

On 20 December 2011 the UN General Assembly voted to adopt a new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The new protocol sets out a communications procedure that will allow the Committee on the Rights of the Child to hear individual complaints from children (or their advocates) regarding potential abuses of their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The protocol will apply to all of the international child rights instruments that a state has ratified — the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, and the Optional Protocol on children and armed conflict. Australia has ratified all three of these.

Once the Committee has received a complaint, they will examine it to understand if there has in fact been a violation of one or more rights. The Committee will follow child-safe procedures and safeguards to ensure that the complaint genuinely comes from the child.

The child's best interest must guide the Committee's decisions, and they also must take into consideration the rights and views of the child.

The new protocol follows intense lobbying since 2006 by a coalition of over 80 international and national NGOs coordinated by the NGO Group for the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

For more information, go to:
www.childrightsnet.org

The inclusion of a Deputy Commissioner with powers, functions and resources to advocate for issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth, is critical to enable this body to respond to the unique issues our children face and develop specific, culturally-appropriate responses that will lead our children into the future.

Devastating realities

This is a journey, and we are moving forward. Each day, however, we at SNAICC are conscious of the devastating and unnecessary realities that continue to plague Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth across Australia.

Using a children's rights approach is fundamental to redressing the issues they face — of poverty and exclusion, inequality and the removal of culture.

SNAICC, in support of its work on human rights, is proud to release its new web pages on international legal human rights instruments and processes — what these rights mean in practice for us here in Australia and how we can mobilise and take action to realise them for our children. (The pages can be found at www.snaicc.asn.au/policy-advocacy)

We look forward to our ongoing work with communities and with government over the next year as we strive even harder to improve the opportunities and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

“Community-driven solutions work — processes that are developed, designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for our people.

“Every day small changes at this level take place. In fact, so much is happening on the ground.

“We need to look at how government systems, services and processes can better empower people to make these changes and to profile, resource and expand this knowledge, to enable it to transform the lives of our children and families.”

— Dawn Wallam



AbSec is the peak Aboriginal body in NSW providing advice on out-of-home care and child protection. AbSec held its biennial Conference at Penrith Panthers Leagues Club from 7 to 9 December 2011.



AbSec Chief Executive Officer Bill Pritchard addressed the 2011 AbSec Conference on "the good, the bad and the ugly" in the implementation of the Keep Them Safe reforms to the child protection system in NSW.

Keep Them Safe is the NSW Government's response to recommendations from the 2008 Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW conducted by the Hon James Wood QC.

One of the most far-reaching reforms is the transfer of out-of-home care (OOHC) service provision in NSW from the Community Services agency to non-government service providers.

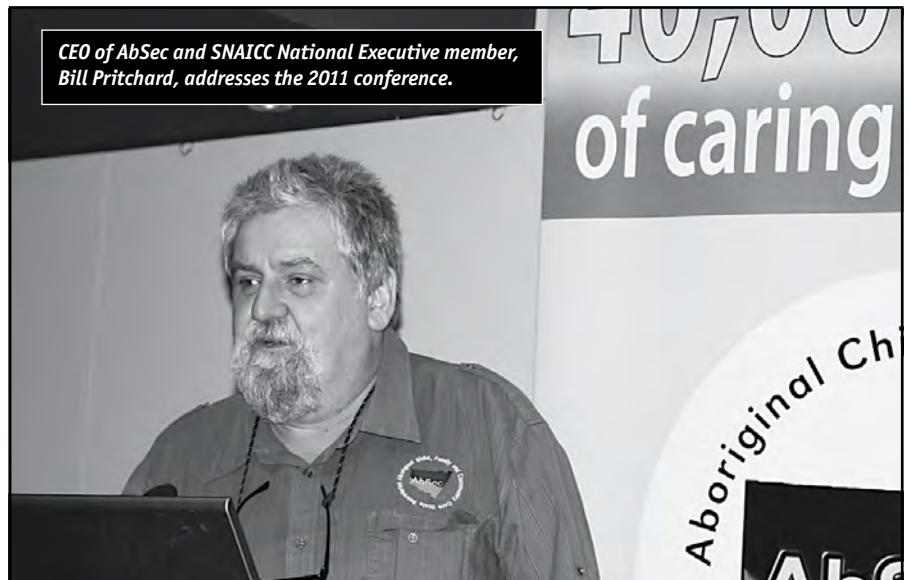
Bill said the transition process would be a turning point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.

The transfer of existing Community Service OOHC placements would begin as early as January 2012, as NGOs take on new placements and non-NGO carers agree to move to an Aboriginal non-government service provider.

"I am excited that the NSW Government has committed to a guideline stating that ultimately all Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC will be cared for by Aboriginal carers, supported by Aboriginal caseworkers employed by local Aboriginal-managed agencies," Bill said.

The transfer was described as a "once in a generation" change by the NSW Minister for Family and Community Services, Pru Goward, a guest speaker at the conference.

Responding in part to the need to ensure culturally appropriate OOHC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



Reforms a turning point for child protection in NSW?

children, the transfer envisages a five-fold increase in non-government responsibility for OOHC service provision.

On average, every six months about 460 non-Aboriginal and 230 Aboriginal children enter OOHC community services placements for the first time.

As of June 2010, there were 7,600 children and young people in statutory (court-ordered) foster care and statutory relative/kinship care with Community Services.

A further 1,500 were in statutory foster care and statutory relative/kinship care placements with non-government organisations.

Approximately one third of all children and young people in statutory care were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, yet only 370 Aboriginal children and young people are in placements with an Aboriginal NGO.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee estimates the capacity of Aboriginal OOHC agencies will need to increase to accommodate 2,000 placements in order

to accept all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in statutory placements.

It is expected Aboriginal agencies will be able to meet the full placement target by 2022.

AbSec is supporting capacity-building for Aboriginal agencies, including the creation of 12 new agencies in partnership with mainstream service providers.

Among other "good" developments identified by Bill was the signing of an MOU between Community Services and AbSec. He said the MOU had led to a stronger partnership between the agencies which recognised AbSec's expertise Aboriginal child protection, OOHC and related child and family service provisions.

The partnership had seen the creation of programs such as the Protecting Aboriginal Children Together, based on the Lakidjeka model in Victoria, and the Intensive Family Based Services (see panel story on next page).

Continued next page

Bill said AbSec was “pleased with the rate the Justice Wood recommendations are being implemented and is hopeful that they will lead to better outcomes for our children, families and communities”.

While Bill said things had progressed in three years to the stage where it was difficult to identify “ugly”, there was still some “bad” issues to deal with.

This included governments’ tendency to overlook capacity building of Aboriginal services in the sector in favour of large non-Aboriginal service providers, when all evidence indicates that better outcomes are achieved by community-driven solutions.

“This still smacks of a paternalistic attitude that does not reflect the real skills and experience of Aboriginal people,” Bill said.

“If non-Aboriginal agencies want to participate in Aboriginal service delivery under the transition plan, they will need to demonstrate to AbSec that they are willing and able to work in a true partnership with Aboriginal agencies.”

SNAICC workshop on partnerships

SNAICC National Executive member Garry Matthews and SNAICC Policy Officer John Burton delivered a workshop on partnerships at the AbSec Conference.

SNAICC is currently conducting research to identify good practices in partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and mainstream organisations in the development and delivery of children and family services.

John highlighted the vital role of our community-controlled services in providing culturally appropriate services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Recognising the reality that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families choose to and often need to access



John Burton at the AbSec Conference

mainstream services, it was vital to ensure our families have a real choice of appropriate services to meet their needs.

Genuine and respectful partnerships provide an opportunity for mutual capacity building that increases the cultural competency of mainstream services and builds the governance and service capacity of our community-controlled services.

John also told the workshop of a successful partnership in Western Australia’s Kimberley between Save the Children and the Wyndham community (see page 11).

New approaches to child protection trialled

AbSec Conference delegates were informed of two innovative pilot programs in NSW arising out of the 2008 Wood inquiry into child protection — Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS), and Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT).

The IFBS program provides a short, intensive home-based program for Aboriginal families (including extended family) in crisis whose children are either at risk of entering out-of-home placement or being restored with families after being placed in OOHC.

The service works with families referred by Community Services Centres for a period of up to three months, including an up to sixteen-week step-down phase. The service’s primary focus is the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the child or young person.

IFBS case workers work with families to improve life skills, parenting



LEFT: Bungree Aboriginal IFBS staff (from left) Brooke Macey, Cindy Hamilton and Belinda Field.

capacities, coping abilities and problem solving. Families are also linked up with community and services support both during and after the intervention.

Case workers are available to families 24/7 to provide support and assist in defusing any new crisis that may occur during the intervention.

The three-year scheme is being delivered at Wyong by the Bungree Aboriginal Corporation and at Kempsey by Burrun Dalai OOHC and Family Support Service. The Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation will soon commence an IFBS service at Wagga Wagga and a fourth site is planned for Clarence Valley.

Belinda Field is the manager of the Wyong IFBS service, which has been operating for six months.

“We’ve had some really good results, especially if you consider that this is not a typical casework model that NSW is used to,” says Belinda.

“Since we started, 10 children have been returned to their natural families.

“I think we’ve been really successful because we’re an Aboriginal organisation and the local community has been more willing to engage with us.

“And we have had the opportunity to develop a close working relationship with the local Community Services Centre, who will call us to get involved in cases at the pre-consultation stage.”

Continued on page 23

A cultural approach to care in Sydney's south-west



KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc (KARI) is an out-of home-care (OOHC) and community capacity-building organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged from 0-17 years.

Based in Liverpool, NSW and working predominantly in Sydney's south-west, KARI has become highly respected since forming in 1999, taking giant steps in filling a void where few Aboriginal services had existed.

Its activities in the past 12 years are testament that a cultural approach to care changes lives.

Starting with just two staff and funded to recruit Aboriginal carers to manage 20 children, today KARI has grown to a staff of 42 and provides full case management of over 100 children in care.

KARI's philosophy is that children should be placed in the care of their own family or extended family where possible. As a result, in 2011 KARI helped 35 children and young people in OOHC care be restored to their family or kin. In 2010, 42 children were restored to their family or kin.

Chief executive Paul Ralph said KARI worked "very hard" with the birth parents to help reunite families.

The parents are given support to participate in parenting programs, life skilling, budgeting, relationship building, advocacy and other programs, with the goal of ultimately being able to take their child back into their care.

Outside OOHC, KARI also provides other community programs and initiatives in its efforts to support stronger Aboriginal communities.

"There is a big focus on education, youth, economic empowerment, advocacy, mothers, fathers and family programs, healthy lifestyles, community unity and culture," Paul said.



"There is a big focus on education, youth, economic empowerment, advocacy, mothers, fathers and family programs, healthy lifestyles, community unity and culture."

— KARI CEO Paul Ralph

The service also delivers prevention programs under the State Government's 'Brighter Futures' and Early Intervention and Placement Prevention Program — both part of the Government's reforms to the child protection system in NSW.

A variety of other highly successful programs include high school scholarships, surfing and fishing programs, rugby league clinics, culture camps, and business assistance scholarships.

KARI also runs an award-winning health clinic, to "identify and prioritise the developmental and health needs of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC".

While recruiting quality carers is an ongoing challenge for all OOHC organisations, KARI's approach is to provide strong carer support, including training, to ensure the best outcomes for children and youth in care.

Paul believes KARI is an example of the positive outcomes possible when governments empower communities and services to deliver their own programs and initiatives.

"If government and departments had more faith in our communities, so much more could be achieved," he said.

KARI is set to continue building on its achievements to date, and is currently



KARI's Community Programs Project Officer, Lauren Drayton, is pictured with Allira Hammond Purcell. Fishing is one of many activities the agency offers.

in talks to increase its service capacity over the next five years.

"We aspire to be a bigger, stronger organisation with a strategy to create generational change, rather than just one or two-year responses," Paul said.

"I think that where we can, our services should aspire to think big."

For more information on KARI, visit: www.kari.com.au

If you are a SNAICC member who would like your organisation or service profiled, contact us on (03) 9489 8099.

New child protection schemes in NSW

Continued from page 21

The PACT service will provide specialist advice and case consultation to Community Services about reports regarding the abuse or neglect of Aboriginal children and young people.

PACT will also be involved in significant decisions and actions at all stages of a child protection and/or out-of-home care intervention.

AbSec and Community Services will work with Aboriginal NGOs to implement PACT, with AbSec having a lead role in community consultation and engagement.

The three-year scheme will operate in the Moree and Shellharbour regions. Following a select tender process, the Pius X Aboriginal Corporation will deliver the service at Moree; and the Myimbar/Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation at Shellharbour.

A local implementation group has been set up at both sites, comprising Community Services staff, AbSec, PACT and community representatives.

AbSec Senior Program Manager, Angela Webb, said PACT aimed to reduce the number of Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC placements with non-Aboriginal carers by making improvements in a number of areas.

"PACT will engage with Aboriginal children, young people and communities to ensure cultural knowledge and advice throughout the court process and on significant decisions within the child protection system of Community Services," Angela said.

"PACT will provide cultural perspective on the assessment of risk and safety. PACT in both Shellharbour and Moree will commence operations in early March and we look forward to improved communication and support for Aboriginal children, young people and families."



LEFT: Aunty Sue Blacklock at the launch of the Winangay Aboriginal Kinship Care Assessment Tool in Redfern, Sydney.

Assessment tool to help kinship carers

In mid-November 2011, SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam launched an innovative new tool to empower Aboriginal kinship carers to identify needs, develop action plans and improve outcomes for children.

The Winangay Aboriginal Kinship Care Assessment Tool was developed by the Sydney-based Winangay Resources team headed by Aunty Sue Blacklock and including Paula Hayden and Gillian Bonser, with support from Flic Ryan and Karen Menzies.

The new resources include plain English questions for conversational interviews between case workers and existing

kinship carers; and pictorial cards to rate carer strengths and identify concerns and unmet needs.

From these, a joint action plan is developed between workers and carers to support the family and improve outcomes for children.

At the launch, Dawn Wallam said: "SNAICC is deeply concerned about the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families for child protection reasons and too many of these children are being placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families."

She said the new culturally-appropriate resources would provide much-needed assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, many whom live in disadvantage but are willing to share what they have to keep the children connected with their family.

For more information on the assessment tool, contact Paula Hayden: paula@winangay.com

We are seeking workshop facilitators

SNAICC is seeking expressions of interest from experienced workshop facilitators nationwide with excellent group engagement skills to join us in our work.

Expressions of interest are welcome from individuals or organisations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations and SNAICC members are encouraged to express interest.

We are seeking facilitators or facilitating organisations who have a combination of knowledge and experience in one or more of the following areas:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare and/or early childhood sectors
- family violence, child abuse and neglect
- cultural competence and partnership development between mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations



- social and emotional wellbeing and/or mental health, and
- governance and management of community sector organisations.

Workshop facilitators or facilitating organisations would be engaged by SNAICC on a consultancy basis to facilitate on behalf of SNAICC workshops for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other workers in the child and family and early childhood sectors. These may be workshops in your local area, or around Australia.

Please contact Catriona Elek at SNAICC on (03) 9489 8099 to discuss how to express interest. A brief outlining our training work and the selection criteria and process can also be downloaded from our website.

New SNAICC staff and volunteers

- 1 Nick Butera
- 2 Melissa Brickell
- 3 Emma Sydenham
- 4 Karla Brooks
- 5 Guy Hancock
- 6 John Burton
- 7 Andrew Pascoe
- 8 Holly Mason-White
- 9 May Drewes
- 10 Clare Bartholomaeus
- 11 Sharon Roussos
- 12 Veronica Jones
- 13 Joanne Borg



New staff strengthen SNAICC

SNAICC has welcomed several new staff members in the past 12 months, who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience, driving SNAICC's work with renewed vigour in 2012.

Below are brief bios of the new staff.

Emma Sydenham — Manager, Policy and Research

Holding a Masters of Law, specialising in the International Protection of Human Rights, Emma has advocated for human rights of particularly marginalised and impoverished groups around the world through various NGOs. Her international human rights work has taken her to the Netherlands, India and Switzerland. Emma also has worked as a lawyer in Australia, most recently with Chalk and Fitzgerald Lawyers on land rights and livelihood issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

John Burton — Policy Officer

John holds a Master of Laws in Human Rights and Social Justice from UNSW. John has coordinated Edmund Rice Camps and Mentoring Support projects in South Africa and Brisbane. He also worked as a Child Protection Officer and Refugee Advocate with the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in the African country of Lesotho.

Holly Mason-White — Policy Officer

Tasmanian-born Holly has a degree in Law and Political Science from the University of Tasmania. Her previous

experience includes working as a Child Participation Facilitator in Mongolia with Save the Children, experience in child rights policy with the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva and governance-focused international development projects in Canberra.

Melissa Brickell — Manager, SNAICC Resource Service

A Yorta Yorta-Wiradjeri descendant, Melissa has a background in teaching and writing, with a degree in Education and Literature, a Cert IV in both governance and training, and a deferred Masters. Melissa has worked in Aboriginal welfare for over 14 years, for both non-government and Aboriginal community-controlled services. Melissa has been active in Aboriginal affairs for over 25 years on issues such as justice, reconciliation, church, and the Stolen Generations in Victoria and nationally.

Joanne Borg — Resource Service Project Officer

Joanne is a Biripi (Taree NSW) and Maltese descendant. Joanne has a background in Aboriginal child and family welfare, working for both government agencies and Aboriginal community-controlled services for over 24 years. She holds a Diploma in Community Services — Welfare, and a Cert IV in Advanced Residential and Community Services — Youth/Child.

Guy Hancock — Design Project Officer

Guy has 20 years' experience in graphic design and production, and holds

a Bachelor of Science in community development and anthropology. Guy has worked in Japan, Papua New Guinea and Fiji in culturally-targeted program research, development and delivery. Over the past decade, Guy worked in community engagement and cultural development for numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in Far North Queensland.

Nick Butera — Resource Service Project Officer

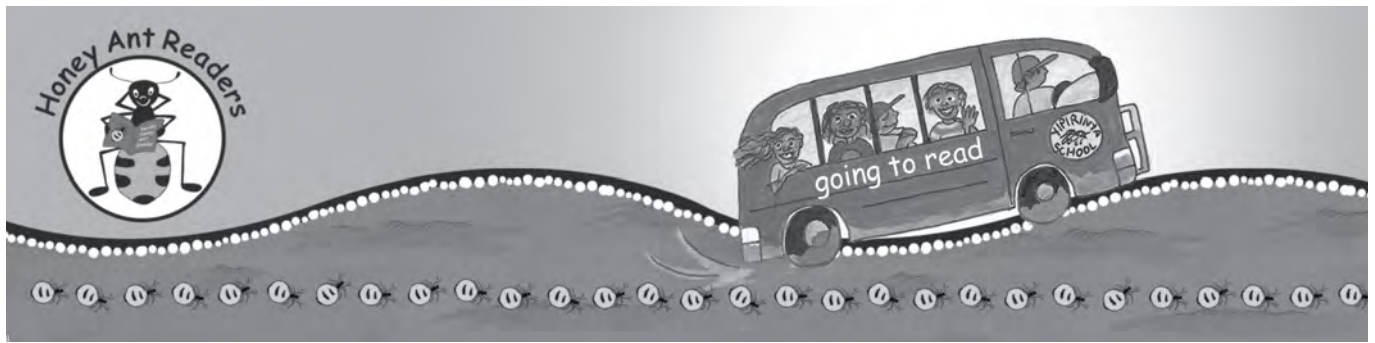
Nick has a Bachelor of Media Studies and is currently completing a Masters in International Development. Nick worked in advocacy and sector development for agencies including the Centre for Multi-cultural Youth, the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health and the Australian Red Cross. He also spent 18 months working at the Northern Territory Aids and Hepatitis Council.

Veronica Jones — Administration Trainee

A Gunai-Kurnai woman who grew up in Victoria's East Gippsland, Veronica worked in the child care sector in Victoria and South Australia for ten years. She is trained in IT and will commence a Diploma in Business Administration in 2012.

Students, interns and volunteers

A number of students, interns and volunteers have also joined us in recent months: Andrew Pascoe, Sharon Roussos, May Drewes, Karla Brooks and Clare Bartholomaeus.



Giving children the best start at reading



The *Honey Ant Readers (HAR)* is a series of 20 storybooks that aims to give children confidence and to develop a love of reading. The books are specifically designed to make learning to read fun and easy.

Author Margaret James has carefully matched the language that Aboriginal adults and children speak among themselves, known as Aboriginal English, to the language of the text.

In this way, children are reading words that they themselves would use at home or in the playground.

The books are full of bright, happy illustrations, the characters are all Aboriginal and the scenery is from the Central Desert area of Australia.

The themes are about traditional Aboriginal life such as hunting and gathering, as well as stories that Elders have given to the author so they can be used to make reading more accessible to children.

Margaret, who lives in Alice Springs, said the books were developed in partnership with Elders in Central Australia, who were involved in the program from the beginning.

The books combine the author's knowledge of teaching reading, language and music with the Elders' knowledge, as well as including traditional ways of teaching.

They are Aboriginal stories, told the Aboriginal way. For example, HAR 11 *Run goanna, run* is about hunting for bush tucker or HAR 12 *Drowned him, drowned him* is about the Rainbow Serpent.

Margaret believes Aboriginal English is as much a variety of English as Standard Australian English (SAE) and deserves the same respect.

Learning through Aboriginal English, the children will adapt more quickly to reading in SAE — which they will need to do in order to achieve in high school.

The HAR education program starts with developing oral language, and gradually becomes more complex.

The program works in the following way:

- It first teaches oral language through picture playing cards, songs and rhymes. It also encourages dance and movement, as physical activity accelerates learning.
- It then introduces words through interactive games with word and letter cards.
- After this, Book 1 can be introduced. As children are already familiar with the pictures and words in the book, they will be able to read it and be very excited at their own success.
- So that learning is very hands-on, the program teaches writing in a tactile way by having the child forming letters in sand.
- Gradually more words are added to each book, so that by book 20, a chapter book, they will be proficient readers having had a lot of fun along the way. To reinforce the children's learning, there are activity books

"The best time for a child to learn to read is when they are ready and interested — there is no right or wrong age," says Margaret James, author of the *Honey Ant Readers*.

"Some children may want to start learning to read when they are five, others when they are three, and some might not be interested until they are seven or more.

"However, it is important to harness that enthusiasm the moment they express it. Before this, the best thing you can do for your child is to read to them, talk to them, and explain everything that is going on around them so that their oral language becomes strong.

"We also know that children who sing and recite rhymes learn to read more quickly than those who don't. We think that this is because it teaches oral language skills and the rhythm of the language."

teaching both literacy and numeracy through puzzles, mazes, join-the-dots, drawing, colouring-in and board games.

The program has been structured so that it can be easily used by people who aren't trained teachers, such as parents, family, tutors and assistant teachers.

In September, HAR released the first three readers in Western Arrernte, Pitjantjatjara, Yankuntjatjara and Luritja languages. Find out more on its website: www.honeyant.com.au

These books are available through SNAICC. Margaret is very happy to answer personal emails sent to margaret@honeyant.com.au

PS: Margaret was a finalist for the NT Australian of the Year Awards 2012 in recognition of her pioneering work with the HAR.

SNAICC's new child rearing resource

The SNAICC Resource Service has published a new publication on **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices**.

The *Growing up our way: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Rearing Practices Matrix* is now available on the SNAICC website — www.snaicc.asn.au

Growing up our way has been developed as part of SNAICC's Child Rearing Stories Project, which has produced a number of publications exploring child rearing themes and the importance of family in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The matrix has been developed following SNAICC's research of the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, values and beliefs.

The research was conducted by Allara Ashton and, initially, Joel Hawting and Jane Harrison (both of whom have since left SNAICC).

With an emphasis on examining practices that assist in growing up strong and proud children, *Growing up our way* is grounded in a strengths-based framework.

Detailing some of the values, beliefs and practices that help children grow up strong in self and proud in culture, this resource is for all who are interested in preserving, promoting, valuing and respecting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices.

One of the key aims of the resource is to preserve and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices for our communities, for our families, and for our future generations.

It also aims to increase the cultural awareness — and culturally appropriate work practices — of those working with, and supporting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, by promoting value and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices.

Growing up our way reflects the diversity of values, beliefs and practices that inform the raising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The resource is for communities, families, organisations, practitioners, researchers and policy officers.

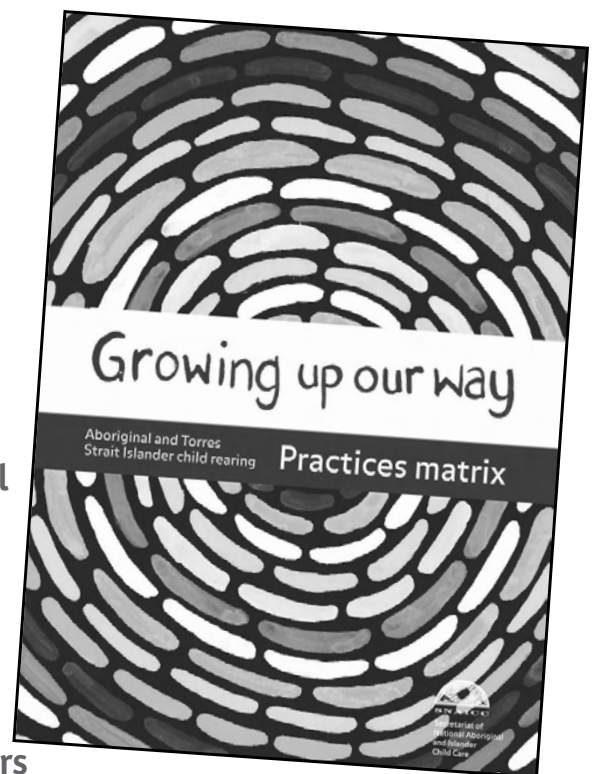
Quotes from literature

Growing up our way provides detailed quotes on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices. These quotes have been collected from the relevant literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, through independent research and interviews with members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The resource is based on themes, with each chapter covering a different theme reflected in the research. With information from various communities and regions across Australia, *Growing up our way* reflects the diversity of values, beliefs and practices that inform the "growing up" of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

With regard to both traditional and contemporary child rearing practices, *Growing Up Our Way* provides examples of the ways in which children are growing up in family and community today, and emphasises the importance of family and culture in the child rearing process.

Recognising that there is no one way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities grow up children, *Growing up our way* can be used to assist communities and families in building conversations around child



rearing and identifying local community and family strengths.

A wide intended audience

This resource has been designed to be of use to many people. It is for communities and families, organisations and individuals. It is for those who work with, and support, our children and families. So whether you are a community member, a practitioner, policy officer, academic or researcher, this resource is for you.

Other resources based on the child rearing matrix — including a community companion matrix and a learning tales kit with activities and poster — will be available soon. Watch this space!

Our thanks

SNAICC would like to thank Waltja Tjutangu Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation and the Warrki Jarrinjaku ACRS Project Team, Yorganop, Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association and Dr Zohl de Ishtar, Merridy Malin and Teresa Bowden Butler for permission to include their work in this resource.

SNAICC also thanks Craig Hammond, Sherri Longbottom, members of the Child Rearing Stories Internet Interest Group, and contributors from the 2010 SNAICC Conference for their involvement in our project.

And a big thank you to the many wonderful mob for sharing their invaluable knowledge, and Melissa Brickell for her assistance in the final production of this resource.

Free posters available from SNAICC

These beautiful posters, highlighting men's parental and family roles, are part of SNAICC's catalogue of wonderful publications.

The posters, produced in partnership with the NSW Family Action Centre, are available free of charge.

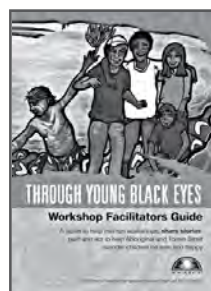
The full-colour A2 posters can be ordered as a set of five, or individually.

To order your set, go to: www.snaicc.asn.au



Another popular resource...

The *Through Young Black Eyes* Workshop Kit, Workshop Facilitators Guide, Handbook, and Community Leaders' Guide are available from SNAICC. Go to our website to order online or call (03) 9489 8099.



SNAICC News is the quarterly newsletter of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc.

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Line art by Nina Kelabora.

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Celebrating
**25 years
of NAICD**
1988–2012

OUR CHILDREN OUR CULTURE OUR WAY

4 AUGUST 2012
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHILDREN'S DAY

Be part of a special celebration

To commemorate an amazing 25 years of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Days, SNAICC is producing a special publication to celebrate the many ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child/family connections and relationships are maintained and nurtured, every day, 365 days a year.

How you can be part of this special publication

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) is a celebration of our children. First held in 1988, it has recognised and advocated the importance of connection to family, community and culture in the development and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

We are inviting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, communities and organisations from every corner of Australia to contribute photographs with captions that show the connections between your family/young children being maintained and nurtured in your cultural ways.

It may be a photo of your children learning and performing dances or

songs, gathering foods or materials, preparing meals, making arts and crafts, doing school work, playing learning games or remembering stories.

These are just some examples, but we know there are many more, so be creative! You may be contributing photos of traditional practices or newer ones, it doesn't matter. What's important is that the photos clearly show your mob doing *stuff* with your kids in your ways.

The photos can be ones that you already have, or you can take some. You can also contribute more than one photo if you like, that's totally fine. Make sure you choose photos that are really strong and that fit this year's National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day theme: *Our Children, Our Culture, Our Way*.

Apply now

Contact SNAICC by phone, mail or email (see details on page 27) and we will send you an Application Pack to complete and return to us. Alternatively, you can go to the SNAICC website and download an Application Pack. The pack will tell you more about this special publication, plus how to get your photo(s) to us.



www.snaicc.asn.au

