



**Celebrating
25 years of
National
Aboriginal
and Islander
Children's Day**

See pages 22 and 24

NT peak body begins journey down new path

The new peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families in the NT is ready to take on the enormous challenges ahead.

The peak body, Stronger Aboriginal Families Together — or SAF,T (pronounced safety) — has become fully incorporated, moved into its own premises in Darwin and is transitioning from its auspiced arrangement with Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT.

SAF,T's inaugural CEO Josie Crawshaw said the peak body's management board had identified a number of priorities.

Some of these will be to re-establish Aboriginal child care agencies in the

NT; play a role in finding solutions to the tragically high suicide rate of Aboriginal children, particularly girls, in remote communities; and work to ensure that Aboriginal children placed in out-of-home care maintain a link to their family, community and culture.

Darwin-born Josie Crawshaw (pictured) is a Gurindji woman and a member of a large extended local family with sporting, business and political links. Josie's mother, the late Nawala (Daisy) Ruddick, was taken from her family at Limbunyah Station, 750kms south-west of Darwin, to the Kahlin Compound along with hundreds of other children now known as the Stolen Generations.



This family history has fuelled Josie's pursuit of equality and social justice for Aboriginal people at the



local, national and international levels including serving as ATSIC Commissioner for the Top End, as chair and founding member of the Top End Aboriginal Coalition, and working on the development of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Read Josie's report on SAF,T:
Pages 14 and 15**



frankly speaking

Hello everyone and welcome to the second edition of *SNAICC News* for 2012.

SNAICC has hit the ground running this year, and has been extremely busy across all the broad areas of its work, producing resources, developing policy papers and delivering training.

While working across each of these areas we have started planning the directions, workloads and budgets for the next two to five years, guided by a number of active sub-committees and by the National Executive.

Clearly, the 'big' issues remain: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities being resourced and made

responsible for designing, developing and delivering services to their own peoples, while being open to anyone in the wider community; partnerships with non-Indigenous NGO where the latter offer support and expertise as requested and the movement of services from the 'mainstream' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community operational management; the proper implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle; and continuing to inform, educate and demand that the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and peoples are upheld.

These are not issues of 'welfare' policy or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues' — they are the most fundamental concerns of belonging to a civil society for all citizens.

SNAICC National Executive member Reuben Ardler and I discussed some of these concerns in a series of meetings with Australian Government ministers and advisers, Opposition shadow ministers and Greens senators on a recent trip to Canberra.

We raised the impact of Government policy on the ground, including the

establishment of the new Child and Family centres across Australia, and some practical measures SNAICC would like to see introduced to improve advocacy of children and family issues and the delivery of services.

Over the next three months, a major focus for SNAICC will be finalising our funding for the next funding period (we expect for three years), and producing resources for National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, which this year will celebrate its 25th anniversary. Preliminary work has also begun on the 2013 SNAICC National Conference, one of the highlights of a year in which SNAICC will celebrate its 30th year of operation.

The most exciting work over the next month or so, however, will be SNAICC's appearance at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York and before the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva.

We have been to training with the Indigenous Persons Organisation who lead the Australian contingent and expect to work specifically at representing SNAICC's views in regard to developments in Australia, as well as working hard to build the international network needed to more effectively lobby governments around the world to do more to recognise and uphold the rights of Indigenous children.

I look forward to reporting on developments in the next issue of *SNAICC News*. Meanwhile, I wish you all the best.

Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO
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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.

I need you

to make SNAICC a stronger peak body for us children by becoming a member. Call Sandy Barber on (03) 9489 8099 today!



SNAICC one of many voices against Stronger Futures legislation

SNAICC has joined a wide section of the community in expressing serious doubts about the Stronger Futures package of bills for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory that, if passed, will extend the Australian Government's intervention for 10 years.

In a submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, SNAICC recommended that the legislation be completely redeveloped in accordance with international human rights laws to which Australia is bound.

SNAICC argued the proposed bills do not provide a coordinated response to the factors that were cited as the rationale for the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). These were serious and complex issues around child protection, and underlying problems of alcoholism, violence, poverty and generational trauma.

SNAICC contended that, as with the initial and amended response of the NTER, the proposed Stronger Futures package is a far cry from the holistic, integrated measures recommended in the 2007 *Children are Sacred* report which instigated the Australian Government's intervention.

While SNAICC believes the Government has tried to respond to a number of core concerns with the NTER, the fundamental flaws remain largely unchanged in the proposed legislation.

"SNAICC is adamant that solutions imposed on communities that continue to undermine their autonomy and strengths, and are in breach of their fundamental human rights, will not succeed," SNAICC wrote in its submission.

SNAICC strongly maintains that legislation redressing endemic issues of disadvantage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be consistent with and also advance core human rights articulated in the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, endorsed by Australia in 2009.



Photo courtesy of Concerned Australians

Against an extension of the intervention: Dhanggal Gurruwiwi from Yirrkala, George Gaymarani Pascoe (Milingimbi), Rosalie Kunoth-Monks OAM (Utopia), Betty Pike, a Nyoonga woman from SW Australia, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann AM (Naiyu), Djapirri Mununggirritj (Yirrkala), Rev Dr. Djinyini Gondarra OAM (Galiwin'ku) and Harry Jakamarra Nelson (Yuendumu).

"SNAICC is adamant that solutions imposed on communities that continue to undermine their autonomy and strengths, and are in breach of their fundamental human rights, will not succeed."

This would ensure compliance with international legal obligations, and that the proposed response tackles the core issues around child protection, rather than the symptoms, and supports empowering strategies that build on community strengths.

Some of the key human rights principles that SNAICC considered are not fully reflected in the Stronger Futures bills are the right to self-determination and the right for communities to give their free, prior and informed consent to measures that may affect them.

SNAICC argued the proposed approach imposes responsibility without ensuring the presence of basic resources, such as integrated children and family support services or adequate housing and infrastructure, without which the issues of positive child rearing, schooling and health cannot be addressed.

SNAICC called for a genuine partnership approach and the development of Indigenous community-based systems for the prevention of, and intervention against, child abuse and neglect.

The package of bills and the consultation process have attracted a lot of media coverage and strong opposition from various sections of the community.

Elders and representatives from a number of NT communities — including Rosalie Kunoth-Monks, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann and Rev Dr. Djinyini Gondarra — have repeatedly expressed their anger and strong opposition to the legislation.

At a media conference in Melbourne on 4 November 2011, they released a statement which said in part: "We will not support extension of the intervention legislation. We did not ask for it. In fact we call for a genuine apology from the Federal Government for the hurt, embarrassment, shame and stigma, and for the illegal removal of the Racial Discrimination Act."

Addressing the Senate committee in March, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda said the cultural competency of governments and the governance and capacity of Aboriginal communities had to be improved if the new measures were to succeed.

He strongly criticised the inadequacy of the consultation process, saying the six-week timeline was too short, some were held in inappropriate venues and interpreters were not always available.

Continued on page 5

A bold new approach is needed in NSW to address disadvantage: Ombudsman



Bruce Barbour

A special report by the NSW Ombudsman highlights the need for governments to work with Aboriginal leaders in developing a new 'roadmap' to strengthen the social and economic futures of Aboriginal communities in the state.

Titled *Addressing indigenous disadvantage: the need to do things differently*, the report was released in October 2011 and documents progress made in NSW communities since 2006 to overcome disadvantage, reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse and increase family and community safety and wellbeing.

In his report the Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour, notes that in the decade since COAG recognised the need for a new approach to Aboriginal disadvantage, there has been no substantial change and many Aboriginal communities still face chronic problems. "Past approaches to remedying (I)ndigenous disadvantage have clearly failed, and new approaches are needed for the future," he writes.

The Ombudsman suggests a number of factors have contributed to past failures of Aboriginal policy. These include chronic staffing shortages in high-need locations, a disjointed and poorly-targeted approach by government agencies, the rollout of 'piecemeal' initiatives combined with weak accountability structures, and the lack of robust community governance and meaningful Aboriginal community participation.

He writes Aboriginal communities have become frustrated with the multitude of 'off the shelf' programs and services, combined with inadequate consideration of how service delivery can be integrated 'on the ground'.

Enhancing the capability of the Aboriginal services sector, he asserts, is an essential component of delivering services that are tailored to the specific needs of Aboriginal communities.

The report observes that "although

some efforts have been made to 'align' state and Federal government initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal people, to date the changes needed to achieve truly integrated planning, funding and delivery of these initiatives has not taken place."

The report focuses on "the importance of taking bold approaches to the priority areas of education, building economic capacity, and protecting vulnerable children in Aboriginal communities."

It asserts that the ultimate goal of government should be to "empower (I)ndigenous people and communities ...so that they can progressively take meaningful control of their futures."

Aboriginal self-determination

A major focus is on Aboriginal leadership and self-determination, and strong community governance. The report argues governments have a critical role in facilitating self-determination, a fundamental human right under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

He says the formulation of a cohesive approach to identifying and delivering on the goals of Aboriginal people "requires an ongoing and robust dialogue between government and Aboriginal community leaders."

"For meaningful dialogue to occur, government must establish formal mechanisms to engage with Aboriginal people, and for this engagement to be embedded in a much stronger accountability framework."

The report includes a case study of Menindee Central School to illustrate how integrating community services and responding to community needs through genuine community participation can produce real and measurable outcomes.

The Menindee school caters for about 120 children from kindergarten to Year 12, 70 per cent of whom are Aboriginal, and has taken an innovative approach

.....
Enhancing the capability of the Aboriginal services sector is an essential component of delivering services that are tailored to the specific needs of Aboriginal communities.
.....

—integrating a number of services and actively engaging with Aboriginal students and their families — to improve outcomes.

The school has seen a rise in attendance across all areas, with a dramatic increase in the attendance rates for secondary students.

The report suggests the NSW Office of Education should consider supporting young people to attend boarding schools, as well as creating a school education trust fund based on the model in Cape York.

However, the Ombudsman emphasises that "ideally, a quality education will be able to be provided to these young people in their communities" and Aboriginal children living in rural and remote areas should have a range of education options.

In terms of the care and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, he says Aboriginal community involvement in decision-making should be increased, including formalising the role of respected local Aboriginal community leaders in decision-making related to vulnerable children and their families.

The report stresses the importance of intervening earlier to address the underlying causes of juvenile offending such as disadvantage, suggesting the key components needed are increased capacity of service providers, and interventions that are targeted, integrated and effective.

The report can be accessed at: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au

Widespread opposition to Stronger Futures bills

Continued from page 3

Mr Gooda emphasised the importance of consultation with and engagement of Aboriginal communities prior to the implementation of measures in order to develop long-term solutions.

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples said the testimony provided to the Senate committee had affirmed its concerns on the new laws to continue the intervention in the NT.

Congress co-chair Les Malezer said the bills had not been subject to parliamentary scrutiny on their compatibility with human rights obligations, in



Mick Gooda

accordance with the new Parliamentary Scrutiny (Human Rights) Act which came into effect in January this year.

The Senate committee received 454 submissions, most of which were critical of the legislation and opposed its continuation.

A report on the legislation was launched on 8 March by former PM Malcolm Fraser. Titled *Listening but not Hearing – A response to the NTER Stronger Futures Consultations June to August 2011*, the report was released by Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the

University of Technology, Sydney.

It argues the intervention remains racially discriminatory and continues to breach Australia's human rights obligations.

The report claimed the "flawed" consultation process had excluded Indigenous people from the design of the consultations, ignored previous criticisms of intervention measures, failed to consider community-led initiatives and aspirations and covered too many themes, which made in-depth discussions impossible.

Malcolm Fraser was one of 27 prominent Australians to write an open letter expressing their anger over plans to extend the intervention and highlighting "unsavoury elements" of the proposed legislation.

The letter can be read on the website of Concerned Australians, which has run an active campaign against the legislation.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin has continually defended the Government's consultations with communities in the NT.

"Between the end of June and mid-August 2011, wide-ranging consultations were held with Aboriginal people and other Territorians on new approaches and new ideas for the future beyond the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

"This built on conversations and consultations the Australian Government has been conducting over the past four years," Minister Macklin wrote in a Stronger Futures policy statement.

"In the consultations, people made it clear that they do want changes. They want to work with government to make these changes."

The Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee tabled its report on the legislation in Parliament on 14 March.

The committee noted "with serious concern the degree of confusion, and frustration expressed in relation to the Stronger Futures consultations."

The report makes 11 recommendations, including that the Government use the framework provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the expertise of Land Councils when conducting further consultation in relation to Stronger Futures.

Major funding boost for communities

In late March and April 2012, Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin announced major funding over 10 years for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory as part of the Government's Stronger Futures package.

The funding will boost education, primary health care, remote policing and the safety and wellbeing of children, youth and families in communities, as well as improve municipal services in homelands and outstations.

Over the next decade the Australian Government will invest:

- \$583 million to enable the retainment of 200 teaching positions in remote NT schools and ensure that all remote teachers have the skills to provide specialist teaching in intensive numeracy and literacy
- \$719m to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the territory, including through new alcohol and drug treatment services
- \$619m to strengthen remote policing, community night patrols and legal assistance services — including the continued employment of 60 full-time NT police officers and the operations of Substance Abuse Intelligence Desks (SAID) and Dog Operations Unit to reduce substance misuse in communities
- \$443m to help support children and families by continuing to fund play-groups, home and parenting support services, youth workers and safe houses
- \$221m for basic essential and municipal services for the 9,000 Aboriginal people who live on outstations and homelands in the NT.

SNAICC is among several bodies, including the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, to welcome the funding for NT communities but express continuing opposition to the Stronger Futures legislation.

SNAICC agrees with Congress that the extra services and infrastructure will bring stability and allow communities and organisations to develop long-term plans. However, the effectiveness of programs and services under the funding will rest on meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations in the NT.

Draft human rights plan in need of major overhaul

SNAICC has warned the Australian Government that its Draft National Human Rights Action Plan ignores the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and will not substantially advance human rights in its current form.

“SNAICC is seriously concerned that the draft plan’s section on the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is silent on the protection of our children, who are 10 times more likely to be placed in out-of-home than other children,” SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

“We urgently need a human rights-based approach to reduce the alarmingly high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families and to increase the chances of children in child protection remaining connected with their families and culture.”

Ms Wallam said SNAICC applauded the Government’s intention to create a comprehensive roadmap for sustainable change in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. But the draft plan lacked specific targets, new initiatives and a process for monitoring progress.

“Without targets and new measures the plan lacks commitment and will be no more than decorative,” she said.

“If left unchanged, Australia will miss a great opportunity to advance basic human rights for all Australians. And it will continue to draw criticism from bodies such as the United Nations.

“SNAICC asserts that, in the absence of a national Human Rights Act, Australia’s legal and institutional protection of human rights is inadequate, particularly for individuals and communities that are marginalised or disadvantaged.”

Ms Wallam said this lack of protection was starkly illustrated by the Australian Government’s proposed Stronger Futures legislation for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, “which directly and indirectly discriminates against our people.”



“If left unchanged, Australia will miss a great opportunity to advance basic human rights for all Australians. And it will continue to draw criticism from bodies such as the United Nations.”

— Dawn Wallam, SNAICC Chairperson

She said SNAICC considered it highly inappropriate that the draft human rights plan referred to the Stronger Futures legislation as a demonstration of consultation and as a sustainable long-term approach.

“In its submission, SNAICC has again called for a strategy in the NT that responds to the *Little Children are Sacred* report and that is in accordance with international human rights laws to which Australia is bound,” she said.

“A meaningful human rights plan would reflect these laws, as well as promote the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to lead and drive measures to close the gap on disadvantage.

“The lack of genuine engagement is the very point made by the latest report on the NT intervention, from Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology Sydney, and which led Malcolm Fraser to describe the process as ‘old fashioned white paternalism at its very worst’.”

In its submission on the draft plan, SNAICC made 87 recommendations with practical measures that would provide better protection and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and in particular a number of measures that address the protection and development of our children.

SNAICC’s recommendations include:

- developing a national strategy as a matter of urgency for the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, consistent with recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- creating a National Children’s Commissioner, with a Deputy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner
- developing a National Partnership Agreement in relation to progressing the Closing the Gap plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in the context of the National Framework for the Protection of Australia’s Children 2009-2020, and
- ensuring the full engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in addressing the severe shortage of adequate housing, particularly in remote areas, as the foundation for improving the protection, wellbeing and development of our children.

To read SNAICC’s submission on the draft human rights plan, go to: www.snaicc.asn.policy-advocacy

Government to establish National Children's Commissioner by end of 2012



The Australian Government has announced it will create a National Children's Commissioner within the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Attorney-General Nicola Roxon said that the new commissioner will focus on promoting the rights, wellbeing and development of children and young people in Australia.

"For the first time, Australia will have a dedicated advocate focussed on the human rights of children and young people at the national level," Minister Roxon said.

"The Children's Commissioner will ensure the voices of children and young people are heard in the development of Commonwealth policies and programs."

SNAICC has welcomed the Australian Government's decision but has urged it to also create a national Deputy Children's Commissioner to address the serious issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"We congratulate the Government on its announcement. This is a hugely positive step forward to protect and promote the human rights of children and young people in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children," SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

"SNAICC urges the Government to go one crucial step further and create a national Deputy Children's Commissioner with a specific focus on our children and young people — the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

"Our children continue to experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage in health, education and housing. While considerable amounts of resources are being invested in responding to this disadvantage, such as Closing the Gap, attention is required to ensure these initiatives address the underlying causes and that they are tackled in a manner that achieves results.

"SNAICC asserts a national deputy commissioner is needed to oversee this important role — experiences with state children's commissioners highlights a need for a specific mandate for our children and young people.

"In the area of child protection, the deputy commissioner could well be the much-needed circuit-breaker to address the alarming overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Islander children in child protection systems across Australia. It is a crisis that is threatening to become a calamity if urgent action is not taken."

Ms Wallam said that if it was not possible to create a separate deputy commissioner position, SNAICC would be keen to work with the Government to ensure the children's commissioner had a clear mandate, specific functions and adequate resources to engage on the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Jenny Macklin said establishing the children's commissioner was key action under the Government's *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*.

"We want every child to grow up safe, happy and well. The new commissioner

will represent the views of children and young people, particularly those most vulnerable, at the national level," Minister Macklin said.

Minister for Community Services Julie Collins said children and young people need a national advocate to ensure their rights are reflected in national policies and programs.

"The national commissioner will not duplicate but complement the work of states and territories, particularly the work of other commissioners and guardians," Minister Collins said.

The children's commissioner will take a broad advocacy role to promote public awareness of issues affecting children, conduct research and education programs, consult directly with children and representative organisations as well as monitor Commonwealth legislation, policies and programs that relate to children's rights, wellbeing and development.

The Government will call for expressions of interest for the position shortly. Legislation for the commissioner will be introduced later this year and the new commissioner is expected to take office by the end of 2012.



"SNAICC urges the Government to go one crucial step further and create a national Deputy Children's Commissioner with a specific focus on our children and young people — the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians."

— Dawn Wallam



"We want every child to grow up safe, happy and well. The new Commissioner will represent the views of children and young people, particularly those most vulnerable, at the national level."

— Jenny Macklin

SNAICC hosts child protection meeting



In early April, SNAICC hosted a meeting of agencies in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to discuss how to address the alarming overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

The aim of this initial meeting was to discuss the current initiatives, policies and practices in child protection across Australia and identify how to build on these

initiatives and create a congruent strategy to provide better outcomes for our children.

The meeting agreed a fundamentally different approach was needed to change the way in which services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families are designed, implemented, delivered and funded.

A campaign will be developed seeking

PHOTO: (From left) Sarah Rogers (SNAICC), Bill Pritchard (AbSec), Natalie Lewis (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak), Frank Hytten (SNAICC), Sam Page (Family Relationship Services Australia), Rani Kumar (Association of Children's Welfare Agencies — ACWA), Lisa Hillan (Healing Foundation), Simon Schrapel (UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide) and Andrew McCallum (ACWA).

the backing of government, community, non-government organisations and the public to support initiatives that are designed and determined by the communities in which they operate, are community-controlled and governed, with policy and funding mechanisms that are coherent and supportive.

Australia's record on children's rights under review

Australia is coming up for review before the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in June 2012. The committee monitors States' implementation of their obligations under an international human rights treaty, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, to which Australia became a party in 1991.

The convention requires that Australia take all appropriate measures, including through, laws, policies, institutions, resource allocation and the provision of services, to ensure that all children, including all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, enjoy a whole range of fundamental human rights.

This includes the right of children to enjoy their culture, the right to the highest standard of health, the right to an adequate standard of living for the child's physical, mental, spiritual and social development, and the right to education, including where possible through Indigenous educational institutions and facilities. It also requires additional resources and measures to support those groups who are most at risk of violations of their rights.

The Government has submitted a report to the UN committee on the progress it has made in protecting, respecting and enabling enjoyment of the rights under the convention. However, to ensure a balanced perspective SNAICC has contributed to a NGO report to inform the committee of some of the realities on the ground and the persistent gaps in human rights protection and support

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth.

SNAICC will also be lobbying committee members in Geneva in June to help advance the dialogue with the Australian Government on critical areas that require improved strategies and support. These include the persistent removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their homes and culture, the gross overrepresentation of children in the juvenile justice system, achieving strong early childhood outcomes through community-controlled services, and the punitive Government approach that undermines community empowerment through the Northern Territory Stronger Futures.

For more information: www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/crcs60.htm
www.childrights.org.au/

Victoria's child protection system letting down our vulnerable children

SNAICC has urged the Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu to implement the recommendations arising out of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry.

"The inquiry's report has found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being badly let down by an ineffective child protection system in Victoria. Our children and families deserve much better," SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam said.

"The five recommendations relating specifically to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the potential to make a real difference in reducing the number of children at risk and in ensuring a connection to family, community and culture for children who are placed into care.

"SNAICC is particularly encouraged by the principle underpinning the recommendations, which is to place more control in the hands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians in finding solutions.

"Greater self-determination for our people is a fundamental human right and is at the core of addressing the many complex and intergenerational factors of disadvantage that are placing our children at risk," Ms Wallam said.

A major recommendation from the report is transferring guardianship of Aboriginal children removed from their families to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) under a comprehensive 10-year plan.

"The inquiry's report paints a grim picture of continuing poor outcomes for Aboriginal children, who have unacceptably high rates of contact with the child protection system and, if placed in care, a precarious chance of remaining connected with their families and culture," Ms Wallam said.

"The report notes that Aboriginal children are 11 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than other children;



Muriel Bamblett

only half of carers of Aboriginal children have support to ensure that the children stay in contact with family and culture; and only 59 per cent of children are placed in out-of-home care in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

"If implemented, the 10-year plan would provide a sustainable funding model, transfer existing out-of-home care placements statewide from mainstream agencies to ACCOs, and provide incentive for innovative partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream agencies.

"Crucially, the plan would build the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, including training for staff, to deliver effective and culturally appropriate services to our children and families."

The SNAICC Chairperson also welcomed another key recommendation: the establishment of a state Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's issues.

According to a report in *The Age* newspaper, the Victorian Government is seriously considering the creation of an Aboriginal Children's Commissioner as part of its response to the inquiry.

"If the *Age* article is accurate, this is an encouraging start — both in terms of the new position and in the urgency Government is showing to implement the report's recommendations," Ms Wallam said.

"For the new commissioner to effectively protect and promote the rights of our children, they will need



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— Dawn Wallam

full independent powers: that is, the capacity to investigate, recommend, intervene, advocate and report publicly on how the system is working.

"We hope that the Victorian Government's intention to create this new role will provide further impetus for the Australian Government to do the same."

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) says real and immediate action is needed to address major issues that contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal children in protective care in Victoria.

VACCA CEO and SNAICC National Executive member, Muriel Bamblett, who was on the inquiry reference group, believes recommendations from the inquiry are an essential step towards meeting the needs of vulnerable Aboriginal children.

VACCA said a whole-of-government response, as highlighted in the report, was essential to make progress in improving outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children across key areas including health and education.

However, VACCA was disappointed that a number of issues it raised in its submission to the inquiry were not covered in the report. These included reform of the Children's Court, extending cultural competency training to government departments and the need for Education Support Workers to engage with children in out-of-home care.

The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak body (QATSICPP) says the gap in child protection outcomes for the state's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continues to widen at an alarming rate.

In its September 2011 report, *Losing Ground*, the peak body reports 2,969 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were in protective care in June 2010 — or 36.7 per cent of all children in care in Queensland.

"If it continues at this rate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will make up half of the child protection population as early as 2015," the report notes.

QATSICPP found adherence to the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle continues to plummet, with only 53.8 per cent of children in Queensland being placed with family or community in accordance with the principle. The corresponding figure in 2007 was 61.2 per cent.

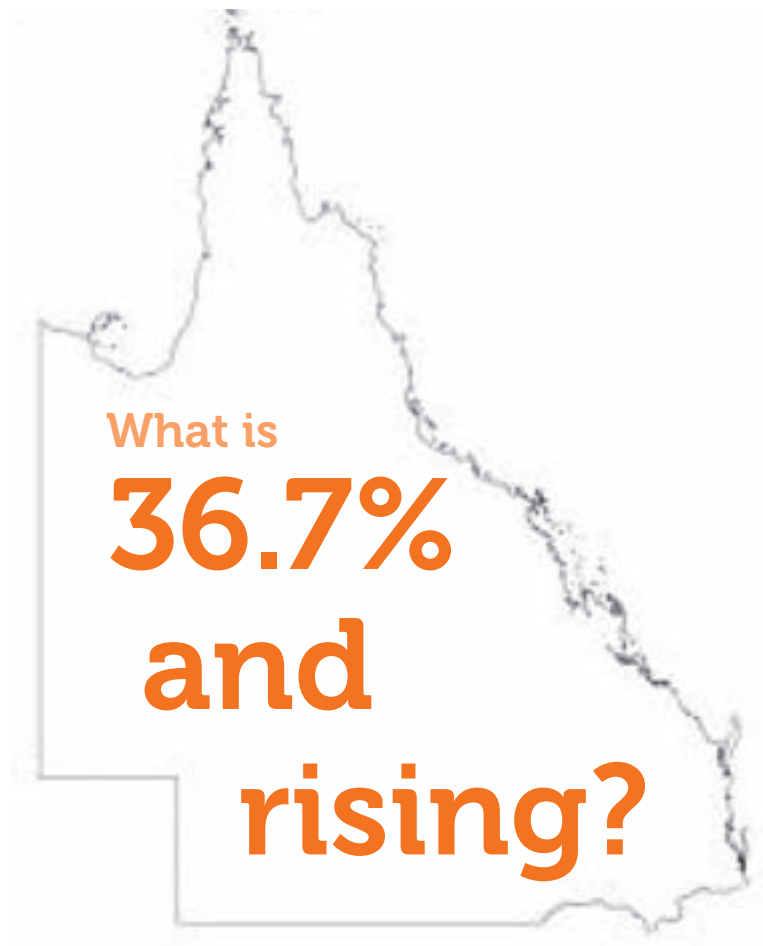
Losing Ground also observes that family contact of children in care is at a very low level. It cites figures in the Child Guardian Report (2007-08) which found only 20 per cent of cases indicated the child had regular contact with their mother and six per cent with their father.

Elizabeth Adams, Chairperson of QATSICPP, says the child placement principle was a community initiative formulated by the newly-formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care agencies in the 1970s, as "a protection against the continuation of the devastation caused to the Stolen Generations and the whole community."

"Long before the (National) Apology, it was an acknowledgment that serious harm can be caused to children by separation from their families, communities and culture," Ms Adams observes in *Losing Ground*.

"Sadly, the most recent departmental data (March 2011) indicates that over 1,337 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are currently growing up without their family, community and culture.

"Our community's lived experience tells us this is not acceptable, research



The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland's child protection system

supports this, our state legislation spells out that it should not occur...and yet it does and the rate of deterioration is accelerating virtually unchecked. 1,337 children and their families are paying a terrible price for this failure.

"The whole community will continue to pay this for years to come."

The report highlights the enormous human and financial costs — to children, their families and communities and the wider society — that will impact on the generations to come:

"Costs to the individual have been clearly demonstrated in the *Bringing them Home* report and includes major physical, emotional, psychological, mental health, spiritual and cultural trauma and loss.

"This will not only impact on the individual but their family and community for generations to come. Lost contact with family and community also represents loss of connection to



Chair of QATSICPP, Elizabeth Adams

land which is a significant spiritual and emotional factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as a significant political issue in the resulting loss of land rights.

"Costs to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community are in the ongoing heartache of the disintegration of the family unit, the loss of cherished children and the loss of future leaders and community members.

"Costs to the wider Queensland population include the ongoing costs of delivering social services to individuals suffering the impact of social

“At the current rate of increase, by 2015 one in two children in the Queensland child protection system will be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.”

— *Losing Ground* report, Sept 2011

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dislocation. This is a widespread impact across many sectors eg health, criminal justice, mental health, substance abuse. In the child protection sector it also includes the impact on future families and the likelihood of multigenerational problems.”

Losing Ground tracks progress — or more accurately the acute lack of progress — since 2007, when QATSICPP published a report on the child placement principle together with a set of recommendations.

It also looks at the major barriers and myths relating to the non-adherence of the child placement principle — despite the principle having been embedded in Queensland law for over a decade.

Some of the myths include the ideas that the principle can place children at further risk of harm; there is a small pool of suitable carers; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are already funded sufficiently to provide child protection services.

QATSICPP does not make any new recommendations in *Losing Ground*.

“Rather we ask that the recommendations of the original report as well as the unimplemented recommendations of the many significant reports there have been, be reconsidered and implemented.”

To read the report and for more information on QATSICPP, go to: www.qatsiccp.com.au

● Ms Natalie Lewis has been appointed the new CEO of QATSICPP, following the departure of Dianne Harvey.

Ms Lewis joined the peak body in February 2012, having previously worked in youth justice-related issues with the Queensland department of communities for 10 years.

Ms Lewis also spent eight years working on diversionary programs in Orange County, California.

National peak body to bridge the disability gap

A national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities was launched in Sydney on 30 March.

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) will represent the 37 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia who are living with a disability and also their families and carers.

FPDN Executive Officer Damian Griffis said the new peak body would have a number of important roles.

“FPDN will advocate robustly for the promotion and protection of human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities to ensure their equal participation within their own communities and the wider Australian community,” Mr Griffis said.

“We will provide advice to government on issues that affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. We will educate both the government and non-government sectors about the lived experience of Indigenous Australians with disabilities.

“We are also developing a 10-point plan for the implementation of the (Australian Government’s) National Disability Insurance Scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities to ensure this policy meets the unique needs of Indigenous Australians.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities are among the most disadvantaged Australians, yet the vast majority remain at the periphery of the disability service sector.

Mr Griffis said among the range of reasons for this marginalisation was the fact that the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities do not identify as a person with disability.



Damian Griffis

He said Indigenous people with disabilities were “reluctant to take on a further negative label — particularly if they already experience discrimination based on their Aboriginality.”

Mr Griffis said the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability had been from a health perspective. While primary health care is essential, it had come at the cost of recognising the social aspects of Indigenous disability.

“This has meant that discrimination against Aboriginal people with a disability remains firmly entrenched,” Mr Griffis said.

“The general wellbeing of Aboriginal people with disability has not improved in any meaningful way.

“It is time to bridge the disability gap in Australia.”

Founding member of the FPDN, Aunty Gayle Rankine, said: “This is an historic occasion, we now have a strong voice at a national level for our people with a disability.”

Mr Griffis said the peak body would use a federation-type model for its membership structure. The founding members are networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability from NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

One of the FPDN priorities will be to support the development of networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities in jurisdictions where they do not currently exist.

For more information contact Mr Griffis: damian@adnsw.org.au

Opening doors through partnerships



SNAICC has published a new research report entitled *Opening Doors through Partnerships* that seeks to uncover the principles and practices that support genuine and respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, mainstream agencies and government in child and family service provision.

The case study based research draws on the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and mainstream partners working together in service sectors including early childhood education and care, family violence, child protection, out-of-home care, and family support.

The partnerships have contributed to mutual capacity building, including increasing the cultural competence of mainstream agencies and governance and service capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The research report identifies promising practices that reflect these principles and provides useful ideas for all organisations engaging in partnerships for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Some of the partnerships and practices that are demonstrating success in implementing these principles are described on these pages.

Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative (GEGAC) and Uniting Care Gippsland (UCG)

In Bairnsdale, in the East Gippsland region of Victoria, GEGAC works closely with UCG in the development and delivery of early years services. A key practice that has made the partnership successful has been the employment of a shared staff member who works fluidly between both organisations in the role of Indigenous Early Years Coordinator.

The shared staff member has been highly effective in building early years service capacity for GEGAC as well as integrating knowledge about culture and ways of working with Aboriginal families at UCG.

This cross-learning filters through at the staff level and improves everyone's practice with Aboriginal families. The shared staff member has become an effective advocate for families with both organisations to ensure that services are delivered that respond to their needs.

Kim McAlister, Director of Early Years Practice at UCG, says: "We use the words 'walk alongside' and we choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do...the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to GEGAC when they're ready for that."

Dalaigur Aboriginal Pre-school

Dalaigur Aboriginal Pre-school in Kempsey, New South Wales, is growing and strengthening their service through a dedicated approach to developing partnerships that add value to their service.

They engage in a wide range of partnerships for the development and implementation of programs and staff training, including with the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF), NAPCAN, Kids Matter, Gunawirra foundation, and the local early intervention service and primary school.

For Dalaigur, an openness to different ways of implementing a program that are culturally appropriate for their children and families is a bottom line requirement for engaging in partnerships.

While Dalaigur strongly values the contribution of partnerships to service delivery they will only work with organisations that are trusting and accepting of the different ways of working in an Aboriginal service, and come with an open mind to develop programs together.

A teacher at Dalaigur Pre-School, Roslyn 'Lotti' Moseley, says: "It has to go both ways. We've got to accept that all children will be mainstreamed, it's a mainstream life and we need to give

Principles for genuine partnerships

The case studies undertaken by SNAICC have revealed a number of important principles that are underpinning genuine partnerships. These are:

- Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
- **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
- Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Aim to **improve long-term wellbeing outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
- **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
- Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
- A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
- Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

these tools to these children so that they can go into a non-Indigenous context and take on the world, but they still keep their culture inside.”

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and Berry Street Victoria

VACCA and Berry Street are working closely together to provide the Indigenous Case Management component of the Integrated Family Violence Services, Women and Children, in the North-West Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

The partnership pursues the goal that more Aboriginal women will receive services from an Aboriginal organisation, and that if they choose to work with the mainstream agency they will receive a more culturally-competent service.

Significant differences in the understanding of and approach to family violence have been a challenge in the partnership. However, Berry Street have demonstrated a commitment to developing different ways of working with Aboriginal people, learning from the VACCA approach.

A significant practice that has

enabled effective partnership was the secondment of an experienced Family Violence program manager from Berry Street to VACCA. This provided an opportunity to develop systems, reporting mechanisms and referral processes that were complementary and for Berry Street to develop understanding around how they could fit in with the way VACCA needed to do business.

The supportive role of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) has been recognised as a key factor, enabling the partners to develop innovative approaches.

“They (DHS) are very clear about working in a very fluid partnership, not a hierarchical structure where they’re saying: we’re the funder, you’ll deliver,” says Kerry Crawford, Executive Manager of Early Intervention and Family Services at VACCA.

“Instead, they’re saying: here’s a bit of space, let’s see what we can do because this needs to be successful.”

For more detailed information about the practices that are supporting genuine and respectful relationships in these and other partnerships, visit the SNAICC website: www.snaicc.asn.au

2013 SNAICC National Conference

SNAICC’s next national conference will be held from 3 to 6 June 2013 in Cairns. One for the diary!

The conference will build on the success of SNAICC’s 2010 National Conference in Alice Springs: *Ampe Anwernekenheke – For our Children*.

SNAICC’s event is the only national conference focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

An expert advisory group of Aboriginal leaders and experts from around the country will help to make next year’s conference a milestone event for our sector.

As last time, our next conference will invite all those working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to share and celebrate, grow our knowledge, challenge others and foster leadership.

And the culture and successes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from the local area also will be showcased again.

If you want to be kept up to date about the 2013 conference, or express interest in participating, email our conference consultant Sharyn Low: sharyn@sharynlow.com.au with the subject line ‘SNAICC Conference expression of interest’, and include in the body of the email:

- your name
- organisation you are affiliated with (if applicable)
- state/territory
- email address
- telephone number.

There will be plenty of opportunities to be involved. A call for abstracts will open in the middle of 2012, and registrations will open early in 2013.

For more information, contact Poppy Bervanakis at SNAICC on (03) 9489 8099.

By Josie Crawshaw,
CEO, Stronger Aboriginal Families
Together (SAF,T)

SAF,T will have a big role to play in helping to develop the sector in the Northern Territory and in supporting those individuals and Aboriginal organisations already working with children and families through advocacy, research and high-level lobbying of government.

The peak body is here for the long haul and the key to our sustainability will be through consultation and engagement underpinned by good governance and strong leadership — and there are no short cuts to achieving this.

Although we have operated for just nine months we are on schedule in building a brand new organisation from the ground up with solid foundations and a clear purpose.

We are forging ahead in realising a future in which our peoples are empowered to determine their own destinies; the rights of our children, young people and families are protected; our cultural identities and achievements are respected; and the vulnerable have access to effective, culturally-appropriate services provided by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Effective governance

One of SAF,T's strengths is that our 13-member management board is made up of Aboriginal community leaders drawn from across the territory. The board met in September and December 2011 to consider our constitution, governance, priorities and "brand".

In February 2012 we became fully incorporated in our own right. We have our own premises and are transitioning from our auspiced arrangement with the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) to complete autonomy.

We are thankful for AMSANT's support to date — particularly during the first six months of our operation before funds were released to our fledgling organisation by our funding body. With those hurdles behind us, we are focused on better meeting the needs of Aboriginal children, youth and families in the NT.



Walking together

In January this year we hosted a meeting in Darwin of our Panel of Experts comprised of local, national and international child protection experts — including SNAICC CEO Frank Hytten. They made a series of high-level recommendations to assist in guiding and informing SAF, T's development that were referred to the board for its meeting in mid-April.

The panel echoed the views expressed by Professor Muriel Bamblett on our recent visit to the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency: the NT is so unique in terms of the massive challenges presented in this sector that in order to promote tangible, longer term change, our model for service delivery must be equally unique to address the challenge.

The task ahead

SAF,T has been tasked with re-establishing Aboriginal Child Care Agencies or ACCAs in the NT. In response to that mandate, and as recommended by our board and supported by the expert panel, SAF,T is currently developing a service delivery arm which we will auspice and support during its formative period.

Rather than adopt the narrower term of ACCAs, however, we prefer Aboriginal Children Youth and Families Support Services, or ACYFSS.

It is expected that our ACYFSS will include parenting and family support programs such as family preservation and counselling support services and family reunification services; placement and cultural support for children in out-of-home care; support and assistance for kinship carers and family way placements, cross-cultural awareness advice

and training to non-Aboriginal carers and agencies, recruitment, training and support of Aboriginal foster carers, as well as advocacy and referrals for Aboriginal families caught up in the child protection system.

In the longer term, one of the fundamental tools underpinning our own effective and sustainable response to assisting vulnerable children and families will be the capacity to gather, store, access and analyse information. Without that, the capacity of our organisation to effectively respond to the needs of children and families at risk will be compromised. Ideally, as the lead Aboriginal agency in this sector, SAF,T should be afforded the same information retrieval powers as the NT Children's Commissioner.

We hope that our ability to access information will be improved through reforms to the Care and Protection of Children Act (CPCA) — Information Sharing, which will come into effect in May. We are also working collaboratively with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations to ensure that broader reforms to the CPCA under way support not only the ongoing development of the peak but the establishment of effective and sustainable services to Aboriginal children, youth and families in the territory.

Despite a great deal of time, effort and expense being invested into the design and implementation of a more effective and coordinated service response, in reality very little has changed, further highlighting the need for us to forge a new path and to develop a different approach.



SAFT board members (from far left): Traceylee Forester (no longer on board), Chairperson Margaret Furber, Stephanie Berrida, Lisa Mumbin, Helen Williams, Sophia Garrkali Gurruwiwi and Norman George.

Below: young brothers from the Palmerston community near Darwin.

on a new path

Youth and families

SAFT is not just the peak body for Aboriginal children but for youth and families as well. I sit on the Child Death Review Committee and our organisation recently made a submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee into Youth Suicide. This is one of the most tragic and pressing issues affecting Aboriginal youth in the NT with spiralling numbers of girls and young women adding to the bleak statistics.

I share the concerns of the NT Children's Commissioner that Aboriginal children as young as 11 are committing suicide at an unprecedented rate in communities where family violence is rife.

Recently the Melbourne *Age* and other national media referred to the territory as the "youth suicide capital of the western world". Our daughters and granddaughters now account for 40 per cent of all suicides of children under the age of 17, which is unheard of, and coincides with increased substance abuse and a sharp rise in the number of Aboriginal women admitted to hospital as a result of a violent assault.

The fact that our women are being hospitalised for serious injury from domestic violence at 80 times the rate of others is heartbreaking. Research indicates that exposure to violence greatly increases the risk of a person taking their own life and emphasises the need for government to focus on culturally-appropriate preventative support services and healing programs to address inter-generational trauma.



Six years ago when the Howard Government launched the emergency intervention in the Northern Territory to combat child abuse and neglect, the number of girls committing suicide was significantly lower.

The NTER has drawn national attention to the level of poverty and deprivation in some of our remote Aboriginal communities, but despite \$2 billion and a name change, can our children, youth and families really look forward to "Stronger Futures"?

I often hear references to the fact that Aboriginal people have the "most" and the "least" of everything. We have the most problems related to community and domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty and disadvantage; we have the least access to good nutrition, health, education, job opportunities and housing.

Children in out-of-home care

Our children are removed and their families subjected to bureaucratic income management if their children do not attend school, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of children in out-of-home care who do not attend school is equally poor if not worse.

Aboriginal children in the NT make up more than 80 per cent of out-of-home care placements.

Two thirds of our Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are placed with non-Aboriginal carers, and only a third of them have Cultural Care Plans.

This means the majority of them have little or no links to culture, community, country or family. In fact, we know that fewer than half of the children in care in the Northern Territory even have a care plan that is compliant with the CPCA, let alone a Cultural Care Plan.

Right now, hundreds of Aboriginal children are effectively lost in the system without identity, without family and without a voice.

Numerous Aboriginal people from across the NT have expressed their fears to me that we are witnessing another "Stolen Generation". "Stolen" may be an emotionally-charged term but I believe their fears are well-founded.

Families are the core of an Aboriginal child's cultural care. Tracing a family of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care is crucial but often complex and time consuming. Currently there is no government or non-government agency in the NT that is resourced to consistently and adequately undertake this work.

There is a clear need to ensure that significant resources are invested to address the number of children without care plans and Cultural Care Plans. We must have bipartisan support to ensure the maintenance of family links occurs in every placement of an Aboriginal child or young person in out-of-home care for six months or longer.

The structure of the child protection system and how it works is a mystery to many Aboriginal parents and families, particularly in remote regions.

Continued on page 20



Miranda Borlini

From humble beginnings over 30 years ago, Lulla's Children and Family Centre has evolved into a central hub for Aboriginal families at Shepparton, in Victoria's Goulburn Valley.

"Our community recognised the significant disadvantage facing our children because of their lack of attendance in early years programs," said Lulla's Chairperson and SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Geraldine Atkinson to explain the creation of the original Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Centre (MACS) in 1981.

"Beginning with me behind the wheel of a blue Toyota that had to be pummelled with a hammer to make it start, we drove around the community and brought the children and carers into the Lidje MACS," Geraldine said.

From day one, the intention was to provide a holistic service — including long day and occasional care, playgroups, cultural and community education programs, and a bus service for children and carers — that was affordable and could meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families

Merger benefits the community

In 2009, Lidje MACS and Batdja Preschool — set up in 1993 to support Aboriginal children to make the transition to primary school — merged and moved into new premises to create Lulla's Children and Family Centre, named after Geraldine's mother.

The centre offers roomy, bright spaces for pre-school, toddlers, babies and three-to-six year olds and a playground designed on the stories of the local Yorta Yorta and Bangarang nations.

Lulla's Director, Miranda Borlini, said the management boards of Batdja and Lidje had seen the need to amalgamate and the benefits it would confer on children, families and the community.



Community hub

Lulla's much more than a child

"The amalgamated service has worked in one sense with having that zero to six years in one centre. So the communication with all of us, so from birth to six and then transferring that on to school. So we've found that's been really important here and worked really well," Miranda said.

The kindergarten is licensed for 25 places — some filled by non-Aboriginal children if vacancies arise — and the day care centre for 46 places. Lulla's is run by an eight-member board, including local Elders and members of previous Lidje and Batdja boards.

Both Miranda and Geraldine stressed that MACS services such as Lulla's go way beyond merely taking care of children so that parents can meet their other commitments during the day.

"MACS provide a link for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids between home, community life and school, and are very distinct from mainstream services," Geraldine said.

"The child, family, culture and community are all central in the MACS model."

Miranda said the centre's 14 staff — all but two of whom are Aboriginal — and board members know the issues that local parents face and are able to respond to problems in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way.

Knowing the issues

"When I first started, we had a problem with some parents not paying fees. So sitting down and just talking through all of that money management stuff, that fees are important and you have to pay them, but it's important that the children attend more than paying the fees," Miranda said.

"A lot of the staff here are related to a lot of the community. With new staff we have made sure that they understand that not only are you looking after the kids but you have that involvement with the families.

"So we know things about the families, with the community obviously outside here. That's very important, knowing the families, to build trust between us."

Miranda said there had been a focus on getting parents involved at Lulla's and



Main photo: story time for the children at Lulla's centre; (main photo this page) enjoying some free time; (top photos) young Jarris is all concentration, Khya and Ellie; Lulla's Chairperson, Geraldine Atkinson.

care centre

"A lot of the staff here are related to a lot of the community. With new staff we have made sure that they understand that not only are you looking after the kids but you have that involvement with the families."

— Miranda Borlini

supporting them at home to look after their children's developmental needs.

Parents can access maternal health, dental and family support services at the centre, which is also used as a place to gather socially and help out.

"Families can come here whenever they want, use the computers, anything they want. It's a family centre, that's what we wanted it to be. On Fridays with playgroup, making lunch, cutting fruit, cooking meals, stuff like that. So that's been really important too, having somewhere for them to come and relax and use the facilities."

Cultural identity

Critically, another feature that sets MACS apart from mainstream services is the fostering of cultural identity,

teaching children to be proud and celebrate their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and giving them a strong, resilient base for later life.

"We do a lot of work on cultural identity, it's very important because some children might not learn lots of stuff at home so if we can give it to them here," Miranda said.

"It's displayed, there's activities leading up to and after NAIDOC Week — it's not a one-off, it's celebrated every day here. But also learning about other cultures too.

"So we celebrate everyone's culture, but every day there's something here for the kids to do with their cultural identity and their families — for example, family trees and family photos of everyone. Recently we talked about how different we all are but how we're all the same. And the kids were like 'wow we're all Koori but we've all got different coloured hands'. So just things like that.

A local Elder visits the centre, telling stories and speaking in her traditional language, and the children also learn Yorta Yorta and Bangarang words. Some children are members of the Damanmu Bangarang Traditional Dance Group, performing at public events in Shepparton and Melbourne.

Early Years Learning Framework

Lulla's has been implementing the

principles and practices of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for over a year. The framework is part of the Australian Government's commitment to "ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions."

Miranda said the EYLF changes had been positive, with the framework being flexible enough not to affect the work on cultural identity and traditional nurturing practices. She said staff were gradually adjusting to the framework and enjoying new practices such as the use of learning stories and intentional teaching, which encourages children to have more input in choosing their learning activities.

A new staff member with experience in the framework has introduced portfolios which demonstrate and document children's learning achievements.

"I explained to the other room leaders that it's really where I want us to go — individual portfolios for the kids," Miranda said.

"And also explaining to our families too. With our parenting program, we'll have a session here and talk about it. Because we're doing the Dr Sparling (Abecedarian Games)...we want to be implementing that in the program. We want our parents to understand that we're educating the children, we're not babysitting them."



SA children's services meet in Port Lincoln

By Sharolyn Talbot,
ARMSU IPSUSA Coordinator

The Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit — better known as ARMSU — is the support arm for the Indigenous Professional Support Unit and Resource Centre in South Australia. It provides support and advice for Aboriginal Children's Services, including the loaning of resources.

Aboriginal Children's Services under ARMSU funding support in SA get together three times a year for two days, twice in Adelaide and once in a country centre.

These meetings are hosted by ARMSU and are a great time for yarning, professional development, sharing "deadly ideas" and supporting each other.

Workforce development project

In March 2012 we met in Port Lincoln on the Eyre Peninsula. Our guest speaker on the first day was Anthony Edgecumbe from Complete Personnel with an update on the Early Childhood Workforce Development project.

This project is part of the 'National Quality Standard', and funded by the Department of Education, Employment

and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to support people working in Budget Based Funded children's services to gain qualifications.

Complete Personnel won the contract to deliver the training component in South Australia, where 24 BBF services, mainly creches, are eligible for support.

The South Australian services are very excited about this project and looking forward to getting started.

We also enjoyed a presentation about the children's garden at Wynbring Jida MACS, Whyalla, linking the activities in the garden to the Early Years Learning Framework. The garden has been given a Bungarla name, *Perru Mai*, meaning small children's vegetable/food. Vegetables grown in the garden were incorporated into the centre's menu.

Children were involved with art activities in and about the garden. The preschool children had a large cut-out of a tree on the wall, and this grew with time. Children would do painting on leaves, which tied into cultural perspectives. There was ongoing extensive discussion about how foods come from gardens, collecting foods from supermarket, introducing new foods for children. Some foods were used for a family cooking night with



parents making chicken, pumpkin and spinach risotto, to take home to share with their families.

Other topics discussed at the Aboriginal services meeting included updates about SNAICC initiatives and the AGM. It was also a time for discussion around new developments for ARMSU with resource development launching the Enews and discussing future professional development needs in Aboriginal children's services (child care, OSHC and crèches).

New resources

The ARMSU Resource Centre presents a regular collection of new resources for children and staff. This supports the inclusion and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in child care and education. This allows growth of knowledge and respect from all children and staff towards Aboriginal people and their culture.

The new resources in the centre were presented and displayed at the



PHOTO: Stephen Walker from Kurna Plains MACS Child Care Centre and Mavis Miller from Minya Bunhii Children's Centre.

PHOTO page 18: Staff from Aboriginal Children's Services in South Australia.

Aboriginal Services meeting. It was a great opportunity to let staff know what's available and during this session staff shared their own ideas from their centres and communities.

At this meeting we had a look at a range of new books, including *Shake a Leg* by Boori Monty Pryor (suits ages six to 12), *Growing up our way* by SNAICC (for staff) and *Ngadjuri: Aboriginal People of the Mid-North Region of South Australia* (for 10-year-olds to adults). We also had a selection of new jigsaw puzzles featuring bush foods, native birds and people living in central Australia and Aboriginal-designed fabrics that services can use for their home corners or display areas.

These resources are loaned out to many South Australian early childhood centres, OSHCs, family day carers and other organisations that work with children. The staff in the Aboriginal services get to have a first look at them and offer their opinion about their

cultural relevance and whether children and staff will enjoy using them.

At this meeting ARMSU also had a special display in honour of the fourth anniversary of The National Apology to the Stolen Generations. On display were books and DVDs about the Stolen Generations that we have in our collection. Also on display were some of the new books that we have been able to purchase with a \$500 grant — many thanks to The Healing Foundation.

It is difficult to look at some of these resources as they bring up many sad and painful stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Nevertheless people at the meeting were interested to see them and agreed that it was really important that they had been created, so that all Australians could gain an understanding of the policies, personal stories and legacies of the Stolen Generations.

The morning of the second day was spent discussion risk management and how to conduct a risk assessment. We used four typical headings requiring staff to create scenarios: opening and closing the centre, cooking/food preparation, running a sausage sizzle and going on an excursion. Even though the topic is serious, staff were very creative (sometimes too creative) with inventing situations to be risk assessed and we hope none of them ever happen. The feedback from staff in this session indicated that everyone felt much more comfortable with the idea of doing a risk assessment in their service.

Visiting local services

A regular event at meetings is to visit local services in the area. As the meeting was held in Port Lincoln we

first visited Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council Gidja Club OSHC (which caters for up to 60 children). The Director, Amber Clarke, told the history of the club and how the OSHC was started, outlined the program and talked about the challenges and successes.

The art gallery on site, Kuju Aboriginal Arts, is Aboriginal-owned and operated. It showcases local Aboriginal art from Port Lincoln and the Wangka Wilurrara region. The OSHC links in with the gallery through their programming with children. What a fantastic connection!

Last stop for the day was at the Port Lincoln Children's Centre where the Director, Joanne Smith, discussed the centre's pre-school and child care programs. We were all excited by the extensive outdoor area which includes a large children's activity area, a vegetable garden, a reconciliation garden and a road safety school area. Joanne answered many questions about her outdoor space and resources especially about the shade materials and soft fall used by the centre.

It was a busy but satisfying two days, providing those who attended with ideas, information and inspiration. ARMSU's support to enable Aboriginal services to come together and have a united voice is invaluable. Those attending identify their training needs and this forms part of the Agenda for the next meeting. The agenda also has emerging issues affecting Budget Based Funded services. The sessions are presented in a variety of ways (visual, verbal, written and presentation) and empower them to return to their services with new knowledge and an ability to be able to implement new ideas.

PHOTOS: Children water the herb garden at Whyalla's Wynbring Jida MACS; and (far right) a display stand featuring new resources available from the Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit.



A place for families to heal

An innovative new approach to out-of-home care prevention in South Australia will provide a space for families to heal and grow as a family.

Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS), in partnership with the Sisters of St Joseph, has developed a family centre as a holistic and culturally respectful alternative to mainstream child protection processes.

The family centre model is a residential program for families who are having difficulty caring for their children. Working in partnership with government, non-government and the corporate sector, the family centre will accept referrals for families to prevent their children being placed into out-of-home care, or for families where children have already been removed.

AFSS is now seeking funding to begin building the family centre in January 2013.

The centre will be located at Largs Bay in Adelaide and will provide a safe healing environment for up to four families at any one time with other smaller homes close by (accessed from Housing SA or community housing) providing transitional housing from the more intensive care environment provided by the centre.

It is expected that families will transition back to their communities and country gradually to ensure changes in their living and being can be stabilised so they can return to their homes feeling stronger and with ways to manage stress differently.



CEO of AFSS, Sharron Williams

Focusing on trauma recovery in the context of family and community, the model of the healing centre will allow families to make their own decisions about the healing process, with intensive family preservation and restoration services for families provided by AFSS.

"It is our role to provide what families need to plan their own recovery so they have the capacity to be able to provide loving and nurturing environments for their children to grow strong," AFSS chief executive and SNAICC National Executive member Sharron Williams said.

The healing centre will take a longer-term approach, accommodating families from between three months and two years in a "safe and homely" environment. This allows families the time and space to heal as a family unit.

"The intention of the service is to address the underlying issues impacting families' or parents' ability to care for children," Sharron said.

The model is based on a "radically different, family-centred and holistic approach" to mainstream child protection service delivery.

"Mainstream statutory child protection models stipulate the solution to the problem by dictating that the parent do certain things: attend a certain number of drug and alcohol appointments, or use court processes to legislate random drug checks," Sharron said.

"But families need more support, not less, to enable them to be able to resume and maintain the care of their children. The causal problem or problems of children suffering abuse or neglect is often linked to key life questions like, 'Who am I? Who do I belong to? Do I matter?'"

Rather than taking an inflexible, top-down approach, the healing centre will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to get to the bottom of their issues as a family, and to develop their own solutions in their own time.

"We are committed to nurturing potential, not dominating; walking beside, walking behind and when invited, walking in front; doing better, not more; being thorough; and demonstrating what can be done," Sharron said.

"The provision of a safe, homely and healing environment will enable families to retain or resume the care of their children, while accessing a range of wrap-around healing services in a family-driven case management model."

AFSS expects the Healing Centre to open its doors by the end of 2014. For more information, please contact Kenise Neill (Kenise.Neill@afss.com.au)

New NT peak body begins journey

Continued from page 15

In isolated, neglected communities overwhelmed with alcohol and drug abuse, there is also a lack of bi-cultural capital and knowledge about parenting strategies and appropriate care environments for children.

How do we find ways to keep children safe in an unsafe environment rather than remove them into the already overwhelmed child protection system?

It is widely recognised that self-determination through Aboriginal community control is the most effective way of providing services to our peoples and delivering sustainable outcomes.

Clearly, growing and delivering a sustainable best-practice Aboriginal Community-Controlled (ACC) out-of-home care and family support service for the territory is vital — and that is our core business.

To assist us in our work, we have done extensive research on interstate models of Aboriginal community-controlled child protection and youth and family wellbeing services for possible application in the NT. I have valued the opportunity to acquire a first-hand appreciation of how other Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are facing the challenges in the sector.

This work is still under way but I cannot thank our friends and colleagues across the country enough for their solidarity and support to date.



SNAICC's training officer Rebekah Francis (pictured) tells of her recent life-changing stay in a remote community in the United States.

Eagle Butte is a Native American Reservation in South Dakota surrounded by plains, prairies and breathtaking scenery; its 1500 residents are descendants of *Tatonka*, the Buffalo that once roamed freely through these ancient, sacred lands.

The phrase, "blink and you'll miss it" is one way to describe the diminutive size of Eagle Butte (spoken from a city girl like me); with its one "restaurant", wood cabin of a hospital, ten shops, one gas station, library, culture centre, supermarket, pre-school, primary school, high school and youth centre.

The isolation of Eagle Butte hits you when you realise that there is no taxi service or public transport and walking in freezing, snowy, conditions through howling winds blowing straight to your bones is sadly your only option. It's about 50 years behind the rest of America and I don't know whether it's endearing or a hindrance.

Hot water pipes freeze in the cold making showering impossible, heating ceases when it's needed most (like -10C in the morning), the internet is more temperamental than a sugared-up toddler, mobile phone service drops in and out, and there is no home delivery service of any kind.

Thankfully, there is no casino on or near Eagle Butte; the notion that Native American Reservations are flooded with money is a massive misconception. The "Rez" is no different to any other Indigenous community that has been colonised and dominated by those who believed their way of life was far more superior; it is ravaged with poverty, high unemployment (73 per cent), teenage pregnancies, alcohol abuse, homelessness and an exceedingly elevated high school dropout rate.



Children take part in the Pow Wow at Eagle Butte.

A glimpse of life at Eagle Butte, South Dakota

The Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) endeavours to curb these alienating and socially destructive behaviours by providing programs for children and young people (aged four to 18) in the community and surrounding areas in activities that promote wellbeing, self-development and growth, community involvement, education and culture.

CRYP was founded in 1988 to support children on the Cheyenne River Reservation by providing them with a safe environment to attend after school and have a healthy meal for the day.

Being Indigenous myself, the chance to be fully immersed in another Indigenous culture was very important for my development and choosing to volunteer at CRYP in Eagle Butte for eight weeks was a life-changing decision.

The children spend their afternoons, evenings and Saturdays at CRYP in the care of volunteers from all corners of the globe who donate their time, skills, expertise and passion.

Children take part in activities such as literacy, sport, health and wellbeing, arts and craft, mentoring, gardening, community events, dance, homework groups and midnight basketball; or they simply delight in playing as kids around the world do.

The children also develop a greater knowledge of the world around them,

who they are, who they aspire to be and most importantly, their own culture.

The centre operates four central projects: the "Main" Youth Centre for children aged four to 12, the Family Services Program, the Winyan Toka Win Garden and the Cokata Wiconi "Teen Centre" for kids aged 13 to 18. It has a full-sized basketball court and gym, library, industrial kitchen, internet cafe, computer lab, art and dance studio and living quarters for up to 16 volunteers.

The cultural exchange was a highlight, as Indigenous Australian culture had not been experienced in Eagle Butte before. The opportunity to sit with Elders, be part of a Traditional Sweat Lodge, witness a three-day Pow Wow, get to know traditional local artists, and in turn, run a self-publishing workshop with the younger children, operate an "Aussie"-themed night, participate in a multicultural evening, be rewarded with a tear-moving "Shawl Dance" at the end and most importantly, get to know the kids is something I will cherish always.

Exploring one's culture through the eyes of another's is an amazing way to appreciate the wonders and beauty of what you have at home. It lets you determine what needs adjusting, be it a major overhaul or a minor service. It's a wake-up call on your life and redirects to back to where you were originally going. Thank you Eagle Butte.

Celebrating 25 years of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day



This year marks the 25th anniversary of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day (NAICD).

NAICD is held on 4 August each year to celebrate the importance and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within family and community.

This year's theme is *Our Children, Our Culture, Our Way*. SNAICC will hold a national launch of children's day (the venue is yet to be confirmed), with local events planned in communities and organisations across the nation.

The event is getting bigger every year — in 2011 SNAICC distributed over 1200 NAICD kits and other resources to help local communities and organisations celebrate the day.

In the coming weeks, SNAICC will again be making available a range of material to help communities including an activity book, NAICD 2012 poster (see page 24), balloons, stickers and adhesive tattoos — all packed in a bright yellow and red children's size book bag.

There will be a bag especially for children, and another for grown-ups.

To mark the special 25th anniversary, SNAICC will also publish a book featuring a collection of beautiful photos sent in from across Australia (see article on right).

Be part of this special celebration by planning and registering your own NAICD 2012 event. Registration is free and fast. Go to www.snaicc.asn.au/children to register online, or download a registration form and fax it to (03) 9489 8044.

Keep your eye on the NAICD 2012 section of the SNAICC web site over the coming weeks for further details. There will also be regular updates in our SNAICC e-Bulletins, on our Facebook page and via Twitter.

"I think National and Islander Children's Day is something that all services throughout the nation should participate in. It's very important that all people understand that those children, those Aboriginal children are representing a culture, that is a long, still-living vibrant culture — they should be respected as children and as First Peoples of Australia."

**— Geraldine Atkinson
SNAICC Deputy Chairperson**

NAICD 25th anniversary coffee table book



Thuppi Warra boy, Ezikel Ware performs a traditional spear fishing dance — one of many photos that will feature in the NAICD book.

SNAICC sends a warm thank-you to all the families and organisations that contributed photos and stories to the *Our Children, Our Culture, Our Way* coffee table book we are currently producing to help celebrate this year's 25th anniversary of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.

Early in the year, SNAICC invited families and organisations to contribute photos and stories that illustrate the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child,

family and cultural connections are maintained and nurtured 24 hours a day, every day, 365 days a year. The response was terrific. We received over 350 photos and now the big job of compiling as many as we can into the book is under way.

Due for release in time for National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day on 4 August, the book showcases positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family life, as well as the work of organisations across Australia that support them.

'Through Young Black Eyes' train-the-trainer workshops

SNAICC's Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit contains a set of resources to assist communities or organisations to run workshops about family violence, child abuse and neglect, and develop child-safe communities. The kit can be adapted to suit local community needs.

In July 2012, SNAICC will start a project funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to run 10 two-day train-the-trainer workshops on how to use the Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit.

SNAICC's workshops will help participants plan workshops in their own communities using the kit.

SNAICC will decide the location of workshops to make sure they are spread around Australia as much as possible, and priority will be given to workshops hosted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. A selection process for workshop hosts will be announced in around July.

If you are interested in knowing more about this project and keeping up to date with developments, this project please email Catriona Elek: catriona@snaicc.asn.au or call (03) 9489 8099.



Iconic Song Books available soon from SNAICC



A series of books based on famous songs connected with Indigenous Australia has been published as a creative way of teaching young readers important lessons in history and the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The iconic songs are *From Little Things Big Things Grow* by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody, Archie Roach's *Took the Children Away*, Shane Howard's *Solid Rock* and Neil Murray's *My Island Home*, made famous by Christine Anu.

Author Martin Flanagan said the *From Little Things Big Things Grow* song was an "Australian anthem of hope" and had made many more Australians aware of the Gurindji people's battle for equal rights in the Northern Territory.

The *Took the Children Away* book features the heart-wrenching lyrics of Archie Roach about the Stolen Generations, and the artwork of his late wife and musical collaborator Ruby Hunter.

The books have been published by One Day Hill Publishing. The Melbourne-based firm was established in 2004 to give "a voice to stories that are significant within our country and attempt to try and capture aspects of Australian culture that are threatened and hopefully assist in their preservation."

The books will soon be available through SNAICC.



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relevant organisations for current information concerning their activities.

Line art by Nina Kelabora.

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OUR CHILDREN OUR CULTURE OUR WAY

4 AUGUST 2012
NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
CHILDREN'S DAY

*Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
family and culture, every day, 365 days a year*

PHOTO: Kathi Gibson-Steffensen, Dhubbi Warra Nation
Guugu Yimithirr children of Hope Vale enjoying their time at the beach.
Quarantine Bay, Cooktown, Qld. With permission.

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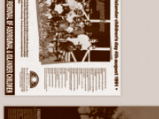
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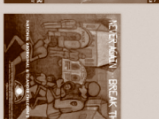
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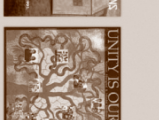
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SNAICC encourages local services to celebrate NAICD and highlight the importance of children to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

This poster is produced by the SNAICC Resource Service. The SNAICC Resource Service is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.