



## Children's day celebrated in style

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) on Sunday, 4 August was celebrated with a variety of festivities across the country.

Some 100 local events were held, with plenty of fun activities for children and families, including arts and crafts, bbq lunches, jumping castles, story-telling by Elders and activities based on traditional languages, art, dance and games.

SNAICC's national launch of NAICD was held in Melbourne, as part of a great family day organised by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

See pages 12 to 15 for snapshots of the launch and some of the celebrations across Australia, including in Brisbane, where young Khan (pictured) was among 100 children to enjoy a family day organised by QATSICPP.



## SNAICC national conference makes history



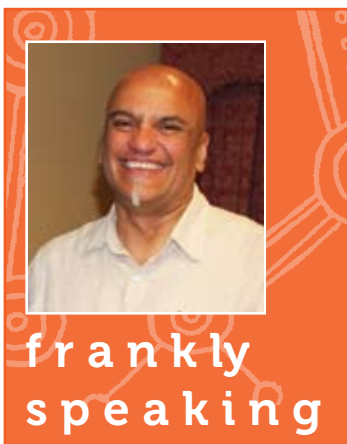
With over 1100 delegates, SNAICC's Fifth National Conference — held in Cairns from 4 to 6 June — is believed to be the largest forum ever on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's issues.

Delegates from across the child welfare sector canvassed the breadth of issues and needs facing our children and families, including early childhood development, child protection, out-of-home care, healing and culture.

The conference featured 70 concurrent workshops that showcased innovative programs, and seven national and international keynote speakers, who challenged and inspired delegates, organisations and governments to work towards a better future for our children.

Conference wrap-up: go to pages 17 to 24.





Welcome to the *September 2013* edition of SNAICC News.

Another three months have gone by and what a time it has been!

After a very successful SNAICC national conference in Cairns (see from page 17), we have already started work on the next conference, to be held in Perth in the latter half of 2015.

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day — themed *Right Here. Right Now. Our Rights Matter!* — was launched in Melbourne in partnership with VACCA. The day was very successful with around 80 children enjoying a range of activities (see pages 12–13). The child rights education kits we produced have been very well received — some 2300 of these

kits have been sent out so far.

Around the country, about 100 events were held and SNAICC supported these with a mailout of 7,000 NAICD bags containing plenty of fun resources for children. You may have seen the 30-second animation ad put together by SNAICC, that was broadcast on commercial tv stations, NITV and Foxtel, and posted on YouTube. It's easily the most successful ad we have ever done. NAICD seems to be getting bigger every year — in 2014 we intend to do better and make it bigger again.

SNAICC's media presence has greatly increased in recent months, with good coverage of our conference, the visit to Australia by former UN official Marta Perez, a major out-of-home care forum in Melbourne (at which Ms Perez participated), child protection issues in the Northern Territory, and of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.

We are also upgrading our web presence, with new pages for the Carers Resource, the 'Family Matters' initiative and our National Executive members. SNAICC's training role is also expanding at a fast rate, with the addition of two new staff — paid for with secured income for the delivery of agreed training. We will continue to seek ways forward and

develop this important area judiciously (see page 27 for more training news).

As a follow-up to an external review instigated by the National Executive of the governance of SNAICC, a workshop was held to coincide with the NE meeting in late August. The workshop considered a range of issues, with further consultations and directions to be set over the next 12 months. This is an exciting time for SNAICC as it looks to strengthen the relationship between our executive and staff.

The challenge over the next three to six months will be to address the recommendations of the National Executive review, improving our financial systems, the web, database and continuing the never-ending process of reviewing and improving our internal organisational systems.

SNAICC has secured funding for the next 12 months from both FaHCSIA and DEEWR. We will continue to work at securing three-year contracts from the departments in future. We feel confident that this can be attained, given that the relationship with our funding departments has never been stronger.

The coming Federal election should not impact on SNAICC greatly. We have met politicians from the major parties and look forward to dealing with the new government (regardless of which party is elected) and keeping issues critical to SNAICC and our members up front and centre.

**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 YOUR SUPPORT

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



# SNAICC welcomes Qld inquiry report, but has some concerns

**SNAICC has welcomed most of the important recommendations in Commissioner Tim Carmody's final report on his inquiry into Queensland's child protection system. However, it has some concerns, including the report's failure to acknowledge the under-investment of Indigenous organisations and its position on adoptions.**

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said SNAICC was pleased the recommendations focused on prevention and early intervention measures, and promoted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and participation.

"Clearly the system has failed children in Queensland and an overhaul of the type Commissioner Carmody is recommending was needed," Ms Williams said.

"SNAICC applauds Commissioner Carmody's approach to reduce contact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the protection system by providing much more support to vulnerable families and parents under multiple levels of stress.

"As he points out, the current system is heavily skewed towards identifying children at risk and supporting them once they have been removed from their families. If this shift towards prevention is to be taken seriously, however, experience demonstrates that it will need to be embedded in legislation."

Ms Williams said SNAICC particularly welcomed the plan for developing the service capacity for integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family services over a 10-year period, supported by the statewide Indigenous peak body.

"SNAICC is greatly encouraged by the Commission's view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection services are a central component of the Queensland child protection system and should be better supported in their service delivery," Ms Williams said.

She said that it was encouraging that capacity building efforts would be informed by an assessment of current strengths and service gaps through the

proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Service Reform project.

A major recommendation is to integrate current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection services — including Recognised Entities, family support, foster and kinship care, and family intervention services — within regional providers.

The Commission recommends that these integrated services be affiliated with a well-functioning Aboriginal or mainstream organisation — partnerships that have potential to promote Aboriginal service delivery.

"This is also a positive move as long as genuine partnerships build the capacity and role of our communities and organisations to care for our children and families rather than redirecting further resources to mainstream agencies," Ms Williams said.

However, she said SNAICC believes further consideration is required on the potential implications of the proposed Child and Family Council — even with the prospect of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander co-chair — and a new Child Guardian position.

"There are concerns about their ability to provide a critical independent oversight role given that both authorities would be set up within government and their reports not subject to the scrutiny of Parliament," Ms Williams said.

"The plan also abolishes the Commission for Children and Young People which — with its focus on evidence-based advocacy — has been one of the most effective child protection oversight bodies in the country.

Ms Williams said SNAICC was disappointed the report does not adequately recognise the current strengths of Indigenous individuals and community-controlled organisations in Queensland to deliver services to vulnerable children and families.

"The roadmap needs to recognise that with significant reinvestment in community-controlled child and family services



**ABOVE: SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams. She says the focus must shift to providing more support to our vulnerable children and families.**

now, capacity growth can happen very quickly for communities that have strong leadership and organisations already in place," Ms Williams said.

"The Commissioner has not strongly recognised that one of the greatest challenges facing our organisations is under-investment in our community-controlled services compared with mainstream organisations."

She said SNAICC was concerned that Commissioner Carmody has recommended increased use of adoption as a permanency option without properly considering the serious impacts that this could have.

"There must be further engagement with our communities and organisations to explore options for stability and permanency that maintain cultural and family connections for our children in out-of-home care," she said.

SNAICC was also concerned that the Commissioner, in looking at relevant experiences overseas, had over-simplified the situation in Canada. The report links increases in over-representation of First Peoples children in Canada's protection system with the decision to delegate powers to First Peoples agencies.

However, the link was made without considering the limited nature of delegations in Canada or recognising the complex causes of over-representation.

"This oversight must not take away from the vital goal to empower and transfer authority to our communities in line with current capacity and growth over time," Ms Williams said.



## Forum looks at stopping the creation of another Stolen Generation

**SNAICC held a forum in Melbourne on 14 June at which Aboriginal leaders, national figures and an international expert on child rights discussed issues around the soaring number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.**

Attended by some 240 people, the forum at Federation Square was chaired by Professor Kerry Arabena from the University of Melbourne, with the participation of:

- Professor Muriel Bamblett, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Aunty Lorraine Peeters, Stolen Generations advocate and founder of Marumali
- Eva Jo Edwards, Case Manager and Programs Officer, Connecting Home
- Megan Mitchell, National Children’s Commissioner, and
- Dr Helen Szoke, Chief Executive of Oxfam Australia.

Another panel member was Marta Perez, the recently retired Vice Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In a critical report on Australia in June 2012, the UN committee expressed concerns at “the serious and widespread discrimination” faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as well as their high numbers in out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems.

Ms Perez visited Australia in June 2013 as a guest of SNAICC to assess developments in the past 12 months.



**ABOVE: Forum participants (from left) Megan Mitchell, Dr Helen Szoke, Professor Muriel Bamblett, Professor Kerry Arabena, Aunty Lorraine Peeters, Eva Jo Edwards and Marta Perez. TOP: Georgina Nicolson gave the traditional welcome to the lands of the Kulin Nation.**

The forum was told Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be removed from their families at alarming rates. Today, over one third of the 39,621 children in out-of-home care in Australia are Indigenous — even though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent only 4.6 per cent of the child population.

The causes of this over-representation are complex and centre on poverty, the legacy of past policies of forced removals, inter-generational effects of separation from family and culture, and cultural differences in child rearing practices.

A lack of early intervention measures and support for at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are also leading to the high removal rates — at great human cost to children, their families and communities.

Muriel Bamblett told the forum that the primary focus had to be on prevention measures — keeping children with their families — and “not at the bottom of the cliff picking up children and families.”

Aunty Lorraine Peeters, herself removed from her family as a child, said she was “sick in the stomach” at the high numbers of children and youth in out-of-home care and in juvenile justice — and a feeling Australia was repeating the misguided practices of the past.

“Who is going to be there for those children in 18 years’ time when they enter into trauma and want to know where they come from or who their families are?” she asked.

“The cycle needs to be broken...We have to stop our children being taken.”

**Continued on next page**



ABOVE: The forum at Federation Square in Melbourne was attended by approximately 240 people.

Speakers raised the persistently high rates of removal on the grounds of neglect, which expose poverty at the heart of the issue, and the continued imposition of an ill-equipped mainstream system that discriminates on the basis of culture. Professor Bamblett reinforced “children’s rights are eroded everyday in the Northern Territory. There is a chronic neglect of a people. We all have a responsibility.”

Eva Jo Edwards said it was time to invest more resources into prevention programs, giving greater support to parents, as well as supporting children in out-of-home care.

“We need to heal children that are coming out of the system before they become parents,” Ms Edwards said.

She said Australia as a whole needed to take responsibility for the over-representation of children, pointing out that only a handful of the 54 recommendations of the 1997 *Bringing them Home* report into the Stolen Generations had been implemented.

Helen Szoke said the National Children’s Commissioner should consider another national inquiry to investigate the causes and consequences of the high numbers of Indigenous children in out-of-home care. She highlighted the importance of a political, legal and societal solution to the removal of these children.

Megan Mitchell put children’s participation at the centre of the debate, calling for strong mechanisms to assist children to have a meaningful role in these significant decisions impacting on them.

She reiterated the importance of early intervention family support services and called for exploration of a “care reinvestment” strategy, similar to the current “justice reinvestment” models currently being debated. Dr. Szoke underlined the cost benefit imperative of investing in prevention — “this case clearly needs to be better made and used.”

Echoing Professor Bamblett’s comments, Ms Perez said there was a need to improve prevention of children being taken away. She said solutions lay in improving living conditions and work opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, more focus on early childhood development needs, and greater support for parents.

“Who is going to be there for those children in 18 years’ time when they enter into trauma and want to know where they come from or who their families are?”

“The cycle needs to be broken... We have to stop our children being taken.”

— Aunty Lorraine Peeters

She said programs and services needed to be culturally-sensitive and under the control of Indigenous families and organisations.

SNAICC is very grateful to all the panelists and Professor Arabena for their time and commitment. We were honoured to have Professor Arabena’s expertise, leadership and support around this critical issue, and grateful for the generosity of Melbourne University for enabling her contribution.

A video of the forum can be viewed at [www.snaicc.org.au/policy](http://www.snaicc.org.au/policy).



**The Melbourne forum marked an important milestone in the development of a national initiative to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.**

The forum was held just days after SNAICC’s national conference in Cairns, where delegates unanimously endorsed the need for a strategic response to this issue (see page 21).

A National Coordinating Group is driving the initiative, comprising

representatives from SNAICC, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, Families Australia, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), the NSW peak body Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec), and Queensland Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP).

Gemma Unwin (pictured left) has recently been appointed as manager of the initiative, which is called Family Matters.

Gemma has a management background in social policy and marketing with the Western Australian Government, in particular, working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

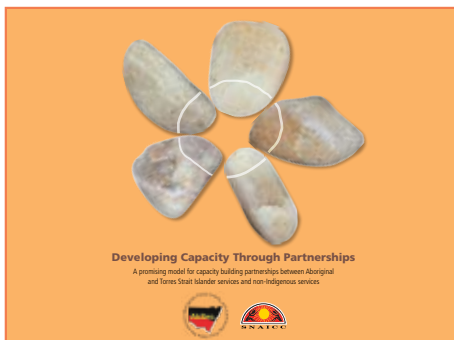
For further information please visit [www.snaicc.org.au/policy-advocacy](http://www.snaicc.org.au/policy-advocacy).



# Current projects at a glance

www.snaicc.org.au

## Child protection



- Together with the NSW peak body AbSec, SNAICC has released a resource (pictured above) that profiles a **ground-breaking new approach to developing the capacity of Aboriginal out-of-home care agencies** through partnerships with mainstream organisations.

This is part of broader work by SNAICC to support better understanding to develop and maintain genuine partnerships in our sectors. In particular, building on research on the requirements for genuine partnerships, SNAICC is developing a resource and training package to support partnership development between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream child and family service providers. The project responds to high demand, especially from mainstream agencies, to build competency in developing long-term relationships with Indigenous agencies and communities. The package will include mentoring support that can be tailored to individual communities and specific partnership needs.

- SNAICC is working with state and federal governments and key sector agencies to advance the agenda for improving compliance with the **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle**. All Australian governments have committed, under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, to "enhance the application and nationally consistent reporting" of the principle.

Significant progress was made in May this year when sector leaders from across the country came together to identify key blockages to implementation of the principle and strategies to overcome

them. SNAICC is working to support agreement on detailed and practical national strategies to help ensure that progress made translates into action — so that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can be safely cared for by their families and communities and maintain connections to their cultures.

- *Moving to Prevention* is a research project being conducted by SNAICC in partnership with Professor Clare Tilbury of Griffith University. It focuses on the quality and effectiveness of **intensive/targeted family support services (IFSS)** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The research comprises an evaluation of identified good practice in IFSS delivered by five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. The evaluation will help build the evidence base about effective programs and practices for meeting the needs of our vulnerable children and families; and enhance understanding in the child and family support sector of the operation and effectiveness of IFSS.

- SNAICC is starting a project to **document and promote diverse local solutions** that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have developed and are using to effectively identify and manage child protection risks.

These community strategies may be traditional protective practices or recently-developed processes that provide an alternative to government-driven child protection models, and work towards early intervention and family preservation within a community context. We have been identifying existing literature and talking with key stakeholders about the focus, content and consultation process for this project, which will kick off soon.

- The national initiative to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care (see page 21) is moving into its next phase. SNAICC, with its key national partners, will be drawing on important research recently completed on perceptions in the wider community of family, identity, care and protection, and Aboriginal parenting. This will assist in the

development of strategic priorities which will include consultations with key state and territory stakeholders to frame a national strategy.

## Early childhood education and care

- SNAICC has been working to bridge critical gaps in the knowledge and practice of educators to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to successfully **transition to school**.

SNAICC recently completed a literature review on the transition to formal school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The review explores current knowledge of how schools, communities, families and early child-hood services can support our children to begin, and thrive at, primary school.

The report proposes that effective transition to school requires a multi-dimensional, strengths-based approach that applies a cultural lens and targets the five dimensions of 'readiness'.

- SNAICC is conducting research, consulting with services and lobbying the Australian Government to confirm **adequate funding for integrated community-controlled children and family services** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (see pages 20 and 28 for more information).
- A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services already fall within the **National Quality Framework**, and its quality assessment process, the National Quality Standard (NQS). Services that are currently out of scope, including the Budget Based Funding services, will be reviewed in 2014. However, these services are already facing pressure to start working within the NQS process. SNAICC believes a critical first step to this review is to consider the cultural competence of the NQF, and the requirements to ensure it is implemented in a culturally-appropriate way. We are working on this analysis and will soon consult the sector on the development of a culturally-competent framework.
- SNAICC is looking to enhance its support to communities that undertake **Through Young Black Eyes training** (see page 27).

# New Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal children a first for Australia

**Andrew Jackomos says he is looking forward to the challenges as Victoria's — and Australia's — first Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Youth.**

Mr Jackomos will oversee a five-year plan for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and provide advice to government and service providers about policies and practices that will promote the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

He will work alongside the Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, Bernie Geary.

Mr Jackomos told *SNAICC News* that the authority that came from being independent from government would enable him to advocate more effectively on the needs of Victoria's Aboriginal children and young people.

"I am here for the kids, I want better outcomes for vulnerable Koori kids," Mr Jackomos said.

"I am not here representing government and I'm not here representing Aboriginal organisations. I'm here for the kids primarily and to get the best outcomes for them.

"I see a key part of my work is promoting Koori culture across the state as being a very powerful factor to build resilience and strong, healthy Koori kids. And together with that goes strong families and strong communities."

Mr Jackomos said it was important that vulnerable children and parents were given more early support to prevent them coming into contact with the child protection and criminal justice systems.

"I spent 14 years in the Department of Justice, that predominantly dealt with adults coming through the system," he said.

"And you just know that we've got to work better and earlier with young kids. And



**ABOVE: Andrew Jackomos, pictured at SNAICC's national launch of 2013 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day in Melbourne.**

even before the kids are born — working with their parents, if they're seen as vulnerable.

"Because you see so many Koories who end up in prison, and who are just churning in and out of the system.

"If we had done better as a society and as a community in looking after those kids when they were babies and following through with them, then they wouldn't be in prison now.

"I just know that the earlier we can provide the necessary support and guidance and opportunities, the less Koories we're going to have in the prison system."

SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Geraldine Atkinson said SNAICC congratulated Mr Jackomos and the Victorian Government on its ground-breaking initiative to appoint a commissioner dedicated to the needs of our children and youth. She urged other state and territory governments to follow suit.

"We believe Mr Jackomos is an excellent choice as inaugural commissioner. He comes from a highly respected Aboriginal family in Victoria and he knows the Koori communities and the challenges intimately," Ms Atkinson said.

"Importantly, as a long-serving senior public servant at both the state and federal levels, Mr Jackomos also knows the workings of governments and departments — and has long advocated the importance of Aboriginal people participating in the design, delivery and evaluation of government programs and services that impact on them.

"Mr Jackomos has an enormous task ahead of him. But SNAICC is confident his knowledge, commitment and passion will serve Koori children and youth well."

Mr Jackomos was Director of the Koori Justice Unit in the Department of Justice, and has a significant record of achievement in areas directly relevant to his new role including housing, justice, and education and training.

**The appointment of an Aboriginal children's commissioner was one of the recommendations arising out of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry, by former Supreme Court Judge Philip Cummins.**

The 2012 inquiry found that Koori children are being badly let down by an ineffective child protection system in Victoria, and coming into contact with that system and the juvenile justice system at alarming rates.

The Victorian Government's Closing the Gap annual report showed that in 2011–12 Aboriginal child protection substantiations in the state grew to 963 — the highest number in the past decade and 10 times the rate for other children.

These figures are reinforced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Child protection Australia* report, which showed that at 30 June 2012, there were 1,028 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Victoria — a rate 15.8 times higher than that for non-Indigenous children.

# Transition-to-school issues of primary importance



## Noogaleek MACS program philosophy at a glance:

- instill in children a love of learning and an attitude that they can do anything
- look at each child in the context of their family
- work holistically to meet each child's transition needs, and
- be an advocate for each child throughout the transition process.

**LEFT:** Children at Noogaleek Children's Services MACS, one of the centres SNAICC visited for its research on transition to school.

**SNAICC hit the road in May this year to find out how early childhood services and schools can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families to experience positive transitions to primary school.**

We visited seven services and schools across New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Victoria, covering remote, regional and urban locations.

We found an amazing variety of positive programs operating in diverse contexts across Australia. All of the programs reveal valuable stories of committed and passionate staff, trusting relationships with families, and positive relationships between early childhood services and schools.

Stories from one of the services interviewed, Noogaleek Children's Services — a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) — in Wollongong, NSW, highlight some of the important principles and components of effective transition to school programs.

Noogaleek began their intentional transition program in the mid-2000s after noticing that children were experiencing many challenges when they started school, including low attendance, behavioural issues and even suspension.

The Noogaleek program works with children, families and schools in the year

before children begin school, with an aim to remove any possible barrier to children experiencing a positive, smooth and stress-free transition.

The program philosophy has several distinct elements:

- instilling in children a love of learning and an attitude that they can do anything
- looking at each child in the context of their family
- working holistically to meet each child's transition needs, and
- being an advocate for each child the entire way through the transition process.

Outlining this last point, the transition coordinator Julie Farquhar-Nicol described to SNAICC how some Aboriginal families themselves have negative associations with, and anxiety around, school. Helping their children to love learning and feel positive about school helps to break this cycle of negative school experiences.

The program runs over the entire year, focusing on three important areas:

1. An intentional, structured and daily learning program that helps prepare children for the activities, procedures and environment they will encounter at school — from numeracy and

literacy to understanding school procedures and rules.

2. A series of personal school orientation visits with Noogaleek staff, the child and their family.
3. Individual case management support for children with additional needs — such as arranging ongoing occupational therapy, or hearing assessments.

Underpinning these three aspects are the strong, trusting and respectful relationships Noogaleek has with their families. Families are included in the transition process, which helps them to build relationships and feel confident interacting with the schools.

Noogaleek has also focused on building positive working relationships with local schools, which Julie feels is particularly important where children or families have additional needs that the school needs to be aware of and that may require ongoing coordination between the school and service.

For further information on this and the other six services we visited, stay tuned for our showcase guide of good practice transition programs, which will be coming out shortly.

You can also contact Holly Mason-White ([holly.mason-white@snaicc.org.au](mailto:holly.mason-white@snaicc.org.au)) if you would like to know more.



# WHOSE VOICE COUNTS?

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection decision-making

**A new SNAICC research report, *Whose Voice Counts?*, considers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection decision-making. The report analyses the effectiveness of current legislation, policy and systems in enabling the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in decisions made for their children.**

The 1997 *Bringing them Home* report documented the tragic consequences of excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives from decisions that created the Stolen Generations. Sixteen years later, this new report questions how far we have come to ensure those voices are never again left out.

The research captures the perspectives of services and practice leaders that support and advise government departments and courts in child protection cases. It describes the value and influence of cultural input in promoting decision-making in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Based on international human rights standards and drawing on the work of the Australian Human Rights Commission, SNAICC has set out the elements of genuine participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in child protection decision-making (see panel).

The advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations has driven increasing recognition of the importance of independent, representative participation in child protection decision-making. However, this research highlights significant resourcing and

accountability gaps that are limiting genuine participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The research identifies reforms needed to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities count when decisions are made for their kids. It proposes stronger models of cultural advice and support, as well as delegation and transfer of decision-making authority as potential solutions.

Priority reforms for state and territory child protection systems include:

- legislative reform where participation requirements do not match the evidence of the value of participation
- increased resourcing where under-investment leaves service models falling short of their potential
- statewide roll-out where strong service models operate in limited locations
- developing structures of independent accountability to promote the influence and take up of cultural advice and/or delegating decision-making authority
- linking cultural advice services with community-led family group conferencing that enables families and communities to engage and find better solutions
- evaluation of current systems to drive reform, and
- capacity and service system development where independent participation services do not exist, learning from the more developed service model in Victoria.

### Elements of genuine participation

#### **Representative participation:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples select their own representatives in decision-making and participate through their own institutions and procedures.

**Consultation in good faith:** Good faith negotiations take place with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the beginning and throughout decision-making with the aim of reaching agreement.

**Free, prior and informed consent:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have adequate financial and technical resources, time and information to reach decisions without external coercion or manipulation. Their perspectives and positions are reflected in the outcomes of decision-making processes.

**Prioritising, promoting and safeguarding culture:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples provide input on the nature and importance of culture in decisions and contribute to processes that promote and maintain connection for children to family, community and culture.

**Children's participation:** Indigenous children have the opportunity and support to participate in decisions that affect them.

**For more information, check out the full report on the SNAICC website.**

First funded in 1983, SNAICC has been a passionate national voice for change



ABOVE: Two key figures in SNAICC's history, former chairpersons Muriel Bamblett and Brian Butler. MAIN PHOTO: The late Mollie Dyer (centre) was the driving force behind the creation of both SNAICC and VACCA.



# Celebrating 30 years of

In 2013, SNAICC celebrates its 30th year as a funded organisation. Since its creation the early 1980s, SNAICC has been a passionate national voice that has represented the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

As a peak national body, SNAICC has sought to inform and change government policies, raised awareness on the issues and needs of its member organisations, developed partnerships with other agencies in the child welfare sector, and produced high-quality resources

to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC's creation was inspired the need to support the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) that emerged across the country in the mid-1970s to deal with a pressing major issue: the high rates of removal of Indigenous children from their families and into child protection systems.

In 1979, delegates at the First Child Survival Conference in Melbourne voted to create a national umbrella organisation

to assist AICCAs and help create new agencies, and promote information sharing and collective action.

Among the many advocates that worked to create SNAICC, two people are considered pivotal figures: Brian Butler, its inaugural and long-serving chairperson; and the late Mollie Dyer, a Yorta Yorta woman who had established the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency in 1976, leading the way for the creation of other AICCAs.

SNAICC is governed by a National Executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives drawn from member services across the country.

In the late 1990s SNAICC's executive decided to broaden the membership base beyond the AICCAs to include Indigenous community-controlled early childhood services. Since then SNAICC has advocated for, and provided practical support to, these and other services working with Indigenous children and families.

At the heart of SNAICC's work — whether on child protection and wellbeing or early childhood education — has been to champion the principles of community control and Indigenous self-determination as the means for sustained improvements for our children and families.

SNAICC's policy, advocacy and resources

SNAICC National Executive members and staff at SNAICC AGM, November 2012





"On the day of the launch of the *(Bringing them Home)* report, a man said to me that the significance of this is that people can't say they didn't know anymore. 'Now you all know what happened, and now something has to be done about it to make sure this can never happen again.'"

— Former SNAICC CEO, Julian Pocock



"SNAICC produces high-quality, engaging, culturally appropriate and very useful resources. So, for us in child welfare, it's important that we get access to materials. All of the resources mean that we don't have to continually have to do that work — that the sector is better engaged because of the work of SNAICC."

— CEO of VACCA and former SNAICC Chair, Muriel Bamblett



"Having a voice like SNAICC allows us to, as a collective, speak out and advocate and lobby for things to change. I think when you recognise where processes aren't working and you speak out about them, you have the opportunity to change things."

— SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams

# service



**LEFT: The first NAICD in 1988 was set against the backdrop of protests during the bicentennial year.**

known as the Stolen Generations — went mostly unknown in the wider community until the inquiry and its 1997 *Bringing them Home* report.

"I guess SNAICC was the organisation that knew first hand how removal had impacted on children and was continuing to impact," says former chairperson Muriel Bamblett.

Addressing the high over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has been, and continues to be, a central goal for SNAICC and its members.

Another defining issue has been advocating to ensure that Indigenous children placed into the child protection system remain connected to family, community and culture.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC and its members have played a pivotal role in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which is now enshrined in policy or legislation in every state and territory.

The principle has been developed from an understanding of the devastating impacts of past practices of forced removal of Indigenous children.

work has also focused on improving cultural competence in agencies developing policies or delivering services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

In the 1990s, SNAICC was at the heart of a watershed moment in the nation's reconciliation process: it was the first agency to push for a national inquiry into the systematic forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from the families over many decades during the 20th century.

The harrowing experiences of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families — who became

Since 2004, SNAICC has been funded by the Australian Government to promote the development of educational resources for services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The resources funding marked a turning point for SNAICC, providing a major financial boost and broadening its role to include practical assistance to the child and family services sector.

SNAICC has produced high-quality resources and reports used in the child and family services sector, which have highlighted the strengths of Indigenous parenting practices and the importance of cultural nurturing.

In recent years, SNAICC has added the provision of training to complement its major resources. An example is the training to organisations on its highly-acclaimed *Through Young Black Eyes* kit on family violence.

Since 1988, SNAICC has organised National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) on 4 August each year to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and cultural pride.

Over the years, the day has also been used to highlight the needs of our children and families and important issues impacting on them. Themes have included the removal of children from their families, child poverty, human rights, and Indigenous self-determination.

# National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

2 0 1 3



Speeches from the grown-ups were kept to a minimum and fun activities ramped up to the max at SNAICC's national launch of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) in Melbourne on Sunday, 4 August.

The launch was part of a wonderful family day organised by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and held at the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) headquarters in Northcote.

The celebration was attended by some 200 guests, including 80 children. They took part in jewellery making, face painting, music and dance sessions with Jessie Lloyd from Tiddas and gum leaf playing legend Uncle Herb Patten, and traditional language activities with Aunty Fay Muir.

The CEO of VACCA, Professor Muriel Bamblett, said that NAICD "allows us to once again give our children's and young people's rights the attention they need."

"We know that when the rights of our children and young people are encouraged and supported they learn to be proud young people, with strong connections to their family, culture and community," Professor Bamblett said.

## Right here. Right now.



▲ Part of the large gathering at VACSAL in Melbourne on 4 August

◀ Narinda is all concentration as she paints SNAICC officer Bec Boss with Kaiyah ▶

"Recently, we asked our children and young people what was important to them. They told us they want to live in a safe world and a safe environment. Our children said they don't want racism.

"They want a NO to RACISM. They said they want more money and support for kids in leaving care; to have a good future; more learning about Aboriginal language and culture at schools; to be heard; to have a good education; and much more."

Two new resources were launched on the day. SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Geraldine Atkinson officially unveiled SNAICC's new child rights education kit consisting of eight posters and an educator's guide (see page 16).

Bev Murray's deadly children's book, *The Adventures of Galnya and Merriny*, about two young possums and featuring beautiful illustrations by Ray Thomas, was also launched and included in a bag of goodies for the children.

The new Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Youth in Victoria, Andrew Jackomos, and former SNAICC chairperson Brian Butler — one of the key people behind the creation of NAICD 26 years ago — were among the guests at the Melbourne festivities.



▲ Bev Murray with a copy of her book  
▼ Essendon FC mascot Skeeta added to the fun



# Our rights matter!



▶ Alfred Bamblett is pictured with little Tayah Bamblett and 'tiger' Tyrone Mundy.



▶ Gum leaf legend Uncle Herb Patten performed and gave lessons on the day

▼ James Atkinson and young son James



▲ Reekiah enjoyed making jewellery

▼ SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Geraldine Atkinson and grand-daughter Celia



▲ Reanna and daughter Myana got in the spirit of the family day



▶ Former SNAICC chairpersons Brian Butler, and Muriel Bamblett, pictured with former SNAICC CEO Nigel D'Souza. The trio played central roles in establishing and promoting NAICD since the first children's day in 1988.



# National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

2 0 1 3

Some 100 local events were held across Australia to celebrate NAICD, by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and mainstream organisations. These pages give a small sample of the festivities around the country.

The Baya Gawiy Buga yani Jandu yani u Centre at Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia's Kimberley region had almost 50 children attend its NAICD event. The children made a canvas of painted handprints to display at the centre, as well as fruit kebabs and healthy wraps for lunch.

The Roma Street Parklands event in Brisbane, organised by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), celebrated children and culture through a range of fun activities, including traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dancing, bark and boomerang painting, weaving, some Quick Tukka cooking and an AFL kick tunnel.

The Lightning Ridge Aboriginal Integrated Child and Family Centre in north-western NSW hosted a NAICD event on Spider Brown Oval. Along with a sausage sizzle, face painting, playgroup equipment and music, the children also had rugby league legend Ronnie Gibbs running them through drills and exercises.

In Darwin, approximately 100 children enjoyed a family day at Jingili Water Gardens organised by the NT Office of Children and Families, Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T) and NAPCAN.

Attending on the day, the Minister for Children and Families, Mrs Alison

## Right here. Right now.



▲ May Goshime Abaymeh and Arreanna Hobbs help with serving lunch at the Fitzroy Crossing celebrations, which was attended by 50 kids, including Cazarus Baker and Tamua Nuggett (pictured right) and local families (below).

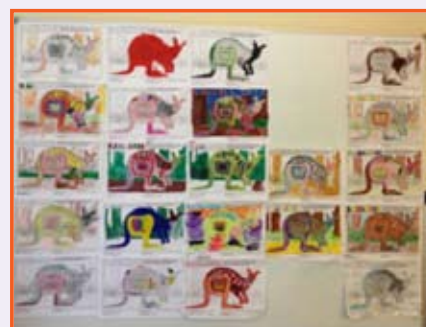


Ebony took part in the Tasmanian Child Care Centre (TACCA) celebrations in Launceston. She is pictured with a book published by TACCA titled *Together We Learn*.

Anderson, said: "Children have the right to grow up safe and cared for in family and culture."

Cultural dancing by students from the local school was one of the highlights at the Thursday Island Childcare Centre event. As well as a traditional feast, and story-telling with Elders, the children created artwork that was later sold, raising funds to purchase new resources for the childcare centre.

Major events were also held by the Tasmanian Child Care Centre in Launceston and the Aboriginal Children and Family Centre at Ceduna, SA, while Port Lincoln held a colouring-in competition (pictured right).



# Our rights matter!



▲ Rugby league legend Ronnie Gibbs with the Lightning Ridge pre-schoolers on children's day (photo above and two below courtesy of *The Ridge News*).



▲ Siera and Nova were among the 100 kids who took part in the Darwin festivities.



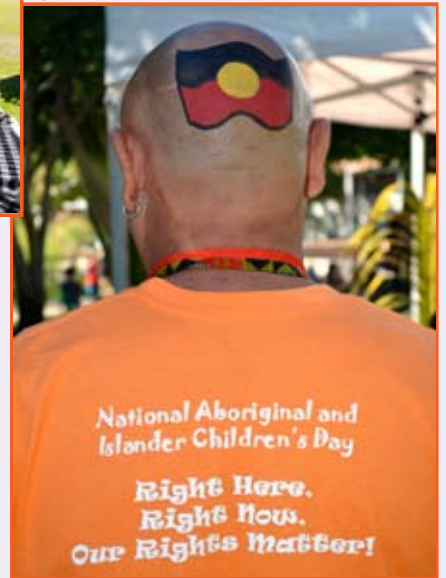
◆ Images from the NAICD event in Brisbane



▲ Leon Taylor was in charge of the barbecue at Lightning Ridge.



▲ Still at the 'Ridge', Robyn Johnson and dietician Polly-Emma Antees with healthy muffins and fresh fruit.



▲ Guests at the NAICD event organised by Thursday Island Child Care centre enjoyed traditional Torres Strait Islander dancing.





# New education kit on child rights

**SNAICC has developed a Child Rights Education Kit to help teach rights to children. The kit is based on the premise that it's never too early to learn about your rights — before we can stand up for our rights we need to know what they are!**

The kit contains eight beautifully illustrated posters — each one focused on a major right of our children — and an educator's guide, which provides an overview of children's rights for teachers, parents and carers.

Specifically designed for early childhood educators working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children up to eight years of age, the guide uses a series of stories and activities that are designed to make children's rights fun and accessible.

Each child right in this guide is divided into three sections to help bring these rights to life in the classroom and other learning environments.

The first section is designed to explain to the educator what each right is about before they begin teaching it. The second section, 'story time', is a series of fun stories written especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The characters in the stories continue through the guide and connect to the illustrations. The last section is called 'activity time' and provides a series of



activities to help educators continue sessions on each human right.

While the idea of child rights may seem too difficult for very young children, we now know that from a young age children are actively developing the skills to understand complex concepts. Their sense of right and wrong, their identity as socially responsible beings, and their sense of fairness are all growing and developing.

Teaching children about their rights is an important part of this development — even for those children who are too young to read the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Learning about their rights empowers children and helps them to claim these rights. It's also important for parents, grandparents and other family members to learn about rights, as well as teachers.

Rights are essential for children while they are growing up. They include being able to go to school and learn, having time to play, being able to express their culture, and having healthy food to eat and clean water to drink.

The education kit was officially unveiled by SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Geraldine Atkinson at the launch of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day in Melbourne on 4 August.

Ms Atkinson told guests that over 2000 copies of the kit had already been sent out to classrooms around the country.

The resource perfectly fits in with this year's NAICD theme: *Right Here, Right Now. Our Rights Matter!*

The stories in the educator's guide were written by SNAICC Resources Officer Nick Butera in consultation with Margaret James from Honey Ant Readers and Cathy Wiseman from Alice Springs. The fantastic illustrations featured in kit were created by Caroline Mudge of Cairns.

The resource is now available for purchase through the SNAICC website for \$20 — and free for members!





Conference photos by Christine Howes

# SNAICC Chairperson hails the 'goodwill conference'

**SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams has described SNAICC's Fifth National Conference as the best the peak body has ever held.**

The conference, held in Cairns from 4 to 6 June, attracted over 1100 delegates, giving it claims as the largest forum on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's issues in history.

But Ms Williams said it wasn't the high number of delegates that made the conference stand out — more the quality and diversity of presentations and the spirit in which it was held.

"I think that when our conference can attract that international expertise and the quality of Aboriginal organisations who wanted to get up and talk about what they're doing in their own communities... that was absolutely fabulous," Ms Williams said.

"And that's what our conference should always be about — showcasing not only all the really good things that are working, but also about what's not working and how practice can be improved.

"We showcased great diversity in our communities and highlighted the types of programs that need to be in place to address the diversity of the community."

Ms Williams said the conference's success was also based on the willingness of delegates to learn and share their knowledge and experiences.

"People came and were excited. It was almost like the Goodwill Games — this was a 'goodwill conference' where people just wanted to talk up everything they knew and everything they'd learned.

"It wasn't a dry information exchange. It was an energetic, vibrant opportunity to

share lived experiences, as well as to gain knowledge about how we move forward."

Ms Williams said the conference had provided a great opportunity for delegates from across the child welfare sector to make contacts.

"Throughout the conference we had lots of conversations with other organisations, whether it was in terms of the Family Matters initiative (on children in out-of-home care) or in terms of our general business working within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with families and children," she said.

"We had non-Aboriginal organisations saying 'hey, that's work that we're really interested in. Can we partner with you? Can we do some joint initiatives? Can we actually put in some joint funding proposals? How do we address this from both an Aboriginal perspective and given that there are so many children in the mainstream system? How do we actually work together to do the best we can for Aboriginal children across the board?'"

Ms Williams said she had been approached by various organisations, including non-Aboriginal agencies, wanting to act on information gained at the conference.

"People have taken away those ideas. They are really enthused about how they transfer some of that knowledge back into their own communities," she said.

Ms Williams said the conference's success was also based on productive workshops and yarning circles — which were led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations — and the calibre of the keynote speakers.

She said another highlight had been the displays of traditional dancing and

## Delegates identify major issues



**Delegates at Cairns identified a number of issues that need addressing, including:**

- improving information sharing between organisations and government departments
- short-term and insufficient funding of community-controlled programs
- the need for more healing programs
- children's voices being heard by the government
- communities taking more responsibility and building on strong local practice
- Indigenous workforce development in early childhood and care sector
- SNAICC being a driver in a strategic and planned approach to advocating for equitable funding for BBF services
- number of children (and the role of men) in out-of-home care, and
- lack of Indigenous participation and cultural appropriateness in the care system.

singing by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school children, who performed before each of the plenary sessions.

Local Indigenous artists and craftspeople also exhibited and sold their work at the conference.

"I would like to thank the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for supporting the conference, making us feel so welcome and providing so many cultural highlights," Ms Williams said.

"It's important to recognise that we were there on the traditional lands of the

Continued on page 21

The SNAICC conference featured renowned national and international experts as keynote speakers, who challenged governments and inspired delegates to do better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Canadian children's rights advocate Cindy Blackstock — a spellbinding presenter at the SNAICC conference in Alice Springs in 2010 — told delegates in Cairns that children are powerful advocates for their own rights.

Professor Blackstock, Director of The Caring Society of Canada and Associate Professor at the University of Alberta, said the key to progress was greater engagement and participation by children themselves in programs and services that affected them.

"We work for children — so we need to work with children to ensure we are doing right by them and their families," Professor Blackstock said.

"Similar to Aboriginal children in Australia, First Nations children in Canada are over-represented in child welfare care due to neglect driven by poverty, poor housing and substance misuse."

She said governments in Canada and Australia had failed their most vulnerable children — a point re-affirmed by the other keynote speakers.

"Governments are simply not doing all they can. These are all solvable problems but equitable, flexible and culturally-based funding is required to empower community solutions.

"Equality is not an aspiration, it is a right."

A member of the Gitksan Nation, Professor Blackstock has spent more than 25 years working with child and family services.

In 2007, the Assembly of First Nations together with the Caring Society filed a human rights complaint alleging that the Canadian Government's provision of First Nations child welfare was discriminatory.

In February 2013, the Canadian Government appeared before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to answer the allegations, in a case that continues. Beginning with only 20 supporters, the case now has over 12,000 people and organisations following worldwide, making it the most watched human rights case in Canadian history.

# Keynote speakers challenge and inspire



**"It proves that one person and small groups can change the world. We have to remember that just because we're small, doesn't mean that we can't stand tall."**

**— Cindy Blackstock**

Professor Blackstock attributed this astonishing success to the power of 'mosquito advocacy', which uses multiple public education and engagement strategies to enlist the support of Canadian and international citizens.

"It proves that one person and small groups can change the world. We have to remember that just because we're small, doesn't mean that we can't stand tall."

In her address, the National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell, also emphasised the need to listen directly to children and give them a greater voice.

"Children have an innate sense of fair play and equal treatment, so they have a lot to teach the adult world and I'm here to listen to them and act in their best interests," Ms Mitchell said.

"It's vital for all Australians to remember that children have rights, they have a voice and it's important that they have an opportunity to participate, be heard and listened to."

Ms Mitchell officially launched The Big Banter national 'listening tour' at the conference, to enable her to ask children and their advocates to help her identify priority areas of work.

Emeritus Professor Judy Atkinson told delegates that government programs and services for distressed children and parents must consider the impacts of trauma or they will continue to fail.

Professor Atkinson, a Jiman and Bundjalung woman and an expert on trauma and healing, said it was only in recent years that services have come to understand the impacts of trauma on a child's development.

"Government policies influence service development and delivery. If governments fail to understand the critical need for a trauma-informed approach to distressed children and their families, services will fail," she said.

"Further, most educational programs have not been informed, and so we graduate students from our universities who are inadequately skilled to respond to the needs of traumatised populations."

Professor Atkinson said there was a "small but significant percentage" of Indigenous children who live in environments where family members may have complex trauma, perhaps because the parents themselves were removed as a child and have difficulty parenting.

**Continued on next page**



Judy Atkinson



Kathy Guthadjaka (Gotha)



Cindy Kiro (left) and Marta Perez

“Consequently such parents are less likely to be able to provide the nurturing caring environment a child needs for healthy growth, because of their own unmet needs.”

Professor Atkinson said this was known as inter-generational trauma and included family violence.

She said programs and services also need to take into account developmental trauma, which may result from abuse, neglect or experiencing violence during a child’s early life, as well as a change in primary care giver in the early years.

Another speaker, Kathy Guthadjaka (Gotha) — a Gadjirrk Warramiri woman living in Gawa in north-east Arnhem Land who has taught for over 40 years — spoke on the benefits of “two way” learning.

The application of two-way learning — wherein Indigenous and non-Indigenous children educate one another, using their different languages, on heritage and understanding — leads to a connection between members of the community.

Ms Gotha said she found that teaching Indigenous children entirely in an unfamiliar language is a flawed system that does not work for its students.

On the other hand, culturally appropriate education could act as the bedrock of health, functioning communities.

Ms Gotha was confident that the bilingual education program being implemented at Gawa could be adapted for communities across the country.

The list of known words is shortening with each generation, being replaced by English words. There is a fear that unless traditional language knowledge increases in step with that of English, Indigenous communities will begin to slowly lose their languages altogether.

Former New Zealand Children’s Commissioner Dr Cindy Kiro called for

Australian governments to combine education, justice, housing and health responsibilities in an integrated way to address the plight of Indigenous children.

Dr Kiro said the lack of a united approach can no longer be tolerated and accountable ‘joined up’ services could take different forms, including one-stop shops — for example, early childhood centres that also work with parents teaching them things like literacy.

She said governments should endorse integrated approaches, by funding them and encouraging Aboriginal community-owned providers to have a systemic approach with secure funding for five to 10 years, rather than from year to year.

“It will also fund decent levels of family resourcing for family group conferencing so that families learn how to make decisions that are acted upon for their children and young people,” she said.

“It took a long time for these families to find themselves in this position, it will take some time to move them out of cycles of dependence, to learn how to make decisions that turn their lives around.

“Governments in developed rich countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand, still do not do enough to address the inequality and unfairness experienced by Indigenous populations despite understanding, more than ever, the importance of the early years experiences on shaping life-course trajectories. In other words, what happens to us during our crucial early years, shapes many of us for life.”

Another keynote speaker was Ms Marta Perez, the recently retired Vice Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, who visited Australia as a guest of SNAICC (see page 20).

In June 2012, the UN committee reviewed Australia’s efforts to comply with the United Convention on the Rights of the Child. It found Australia was failing

to protect and support its vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Ms Perez told delegates that discrimination was particularly evident in Indigenous children’s lack of access to basic services, and their very high numbers in the juvenile justice system and out-of-home care.

She called on the Australian Government to urgently improve its efforts to redress the disadvantages faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

“Collective effort is needed to ensure that all children have the same opportunities for a healthy and fulfilling life. Evidence before the committee in mid 2012 showed that this is still not the case for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,” she said.

Ms Perez said the Convention on the Rights of the Child — to which Australia is a signatory — provided a strong blueprint for the basic needs of children.

“It is also the first international legally-binding agreement that recognises the special and unique rights of Indigenous children. This Convention provides a clear map for urgent priorities to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — Australia’s most vulnerable citizens,” she said.

Ms Perez said participation of Indigenous peoples was at the core of change for Indigenous children: “The power of mechanisms and supports that enable genuine participation can be staggering. Similarly, allocating clear resources and improving monitoring mechanisms will see tangible benefits for the most vulnerable groups.”

Ms Perez, who was Special Rapporteur for Australia in 2012, said the disproportionate impact of poverty on Indigenous children was a major issue requiring redress across the globe.



## Governments must commit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres

Representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres across Australia met at Cairns and called on the Australian and state-territory governments to urgently confirm funding for the centres beyond June 2014 and ensure their long-term future.

Representatives from 22 (of the 38) centres urged governments to act quickly or risk the closure of centres and the withdrawal of crucial support services for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait families, for whom the new centres were designed.

Thirty-eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres have been established under a \$300m national partnership agreement between the Australian and state-territory governments.

This funding ends in June 2014 and centres have been advised to prepare for funding through the mainstream child care benefit system.

"This approach will have grave consequences for our Centres. Centre closure, a lapse of key integrated family support services and the exclusion of the most vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families for whom these Centres were designed, are all likely," centre representatives said in a signed statement.

"The 38 Centres cannot be left to fail just four years after federal investment of \$300 million

**"The 38 centres cannot be left to fail just four years after federal investment of \$300 million Indigenous-designated funds. They have huge potential to see change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families..."**

Indigenous-designated funds. They have huge potential to see change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, in accordance with their objectives under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development.

"With the prospect of no funding within 12 months, our Centres cannot plan for the future, offer contracts for staff beyond June 2014, invest in critical local workforce development or develop long-term service partnerships to work towards closing the gap for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our communities."

Representatives called on governments to confirm funding for the centres after June 2014 and to reach a bipartisan ten-year commitment to enable them to meet their core objective of integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

See the back page for information on SNAICC's postcard campaign and the SNAICC website for the full statement from the children and family centre representatives.

## A special guest from the United Nations



ABOVE: Marta Perez with students at Yarrabah community.

**Keynote speaker Marta Perez, the recently retired Vice Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, visited Australia in June 2013 as a guest of SNAICC.**

In June 2012, the UN committee reviewed Australia's efforts to comply with the United Convention on the Rights of the Child. It found Australia was failing to protect and support its vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Ms Perez visited Australia to gauge progress since June 2012, speak at the conference and a Stolen Generations forum in Melbourne, and meet with Federal members of Parliament, including Minister Kate Ellis, Senator Nigel Scullion, Sussan Ley, Ken Wyatt, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young and Senator Penny Wright.

After the conference in Cairns, Ms Perez visited the nearby Aboriginal community of Yarrabah. Given a tour by community leader Elverina Johnson, Ms Perez visited the art centre and museum, and met with workers at the health service, the women's centre and students at Yarrabah State School.

Ms Perez's time in Australia attracted considerable interest in both mainstream and Indigenous media. A key message from Ms Perez was the need for governments to promote genuine participation and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children, to redress the underlying factors of disadvantage.

# The goodwill conference

Continued from page 17

Gimuy Yidinji, Yirrganydji, Djabugay and Gunggandji people and had their blessing to hold a conference that was about the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families."

Ms Williams thanked a number of other people on behalf of SNAICC for making the conference such an enjoyable experience:

- National Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell for her participation and official opening
- workshop and yarning circle facilitators and participants
- major supporters, including the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- conference organiser Sharyn Low and coordinator Poppy Bervanakis
- the Conference Advisory Group, led by SNAICC Deputy Chairperson and RAATSICC CEO Desley Thompson, and
- SNAICC and RAATSICC staff.



Elaine Tiparui and Patricia Sawmill (Munkarra)



ABOVE: The South Australian mob: Ruth Miller, Margaret Nelson, Ann Newchurch, Wayne Rigney and Joel Charnstrom



"Loads of great information, common strengths and challenges and what and how to approach these. Enjoyed the showcasing of the children through the performances, they were very moving."

— Conference delegate

BELOW LEFT: Boleen Gorrige and Kim Adams from Palm Island community. BELOW: SNAICC National Executive member Maureen Mossman (left) with Ross Hughes and Maxine Mackay from AECSL.



## Urgent action needed on children in out-of-home care

**Delegates at Cairns unanimously endorsed a national initiative to halve the dramatically high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2018.**

In an emotionally-charged session, delegates at the conference committed to support the national campaign and take action to achieve its objective by 2018.

SNAICC will partner a number of agencies in running the initiative, which will seek to create a groundswell of support from the Australian community to change what one conference speaker described as "our national shame".

In mid-2012, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for over one-third of the 39,600 children in out-of-home care across Australia.

Recent figures in Queensland indicate that, this year, 62 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have had some contact with the state's child protection system.

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams told

delegates the high number of children in care was "diabological." "Our children have rights. It is time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families stand up and say enough. We will not stand for this any longer," she said.

Delegates agreed that different approaches were needed to support vulnerable families and reduce their contact with child protection systems.

These new solutions must be driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, place families at the centre and enable participation of children and young people to drive renewed efforts.

Delegates committed to take personal responsibility and action at the local level to ensure safe and nurturing communities. They also reinforced the need to hold governments more accountable for fundamental human rights.

Along with SNAICC, founding organisations in the national initiative include:

- Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat

(NSW) — AbSec

- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
- Families Australia, and
- the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

The initiative has the following vision:

*All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safely at home, get a good education, are healthy and proud of who they are.*

The initiative has two aims:

- Stage One: To halve the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2018.
- Stage Two: To reduce, by 2023, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care so that it is proportionate to their representation in the general Australian population.

# Young lawyers look on the positive side

**Krista McMeeken and April Long's presentation at the conference examined the roles international law and constitutional recognition can play in achieving positive outcomes for our communities, families and children.**

Their presentation highlights the need for Australian constitutional change that ensures the recognition and equal development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Krista and April spoke of their 2011 presentation to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva (a presentation given along with Gotha Guthanjuaka) and of their experience as Aboriginal women speaking on an international platform.

The UN experience led Krista to encourage our communities and our families to gain knowledge of the processes and mechanisms that can be used to address issues facing our communities and raise awareness in the wider community.

Wider community awareness, Krista observed, should not simply focus on the issues facing our communities, but should also include a positive conversation around the triumphs and successful achievements within our communities.

"The communication coming out of our communities should not just be limited to the issues we face, but should also extend to our triumphs ... there are a lot of positive things happening in our communities and they deserve to be shared".

April Long noted that celebrating and sharing positive images and stories of our children, families and communities is necessary to overcome the dominant negative discourse that continues to permeate the Australian media.



Krista McMeeken (pictured left) is a Nyoongar woman from the south-west coast of Western Australia. She is a qualified lawyer passionate about advocacy, human rights, cultural development and reconciliation in Australia.

April Long (above) is a Gumbangir Darkinjung woman with ties to many communities. She is a lawyer who has worked with young Aboriginal people and currently works at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern, NSW.

"To a large extent, what we don't see in the mainstream media are the 300 young Indigenous people that I attended university with at the University of New South Wales, or the 40 deadly young change makers at the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy that identified issues in their community and took action," she said.

Krista said communities could take further affirmative steps by promoting community views to the wider Australian community.

She urged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote community needs, views and success stories, as well as engaging with the national and international processes and mechanisms that can effect social change.

"I strongly encourage you to access the information available in regard to constitutional reform, to make a decision for yourself and to become an advocate in your community — sharing the information with others — so that they too can make an informed decision on constitutional recognition for themselves," she said.

Krista and April spoke of the importance of engaging in discussions around

**"The communication coming out of our communities should not just be limited to the issues we face, but should also extend to our triumphs..."**

**— Krista McMeeken**

constitutional recognition for Australia's First Peoples.

"As it stands, constitutional recognition is the issue on the agenda now. As we currently have the political leaders on board, we should take the opportunity", April said.

Krista called on the Australian Government to adopt the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in all negotiations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Krista would like to see the declaration enshrined in Australian law "so that it represents a baseline requirement for all negotiations and developments with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and not simply our aspirations."



The IFSS team at Save the Children NT

## Working with parents to grow children up strong

**At the Cairns conference, Save the Children NT delivered one of many presentations of innovative programs supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.**

Save the Children run the Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS), a program that works with families referred from the NT Office of Children and Families to improve outcomes for children where neglect has been substantiated or who have been identified as being at high risk of neglect.

Families referred to the program must have been placed on the Child Protection Income Measure of 70-30 and have at least one child under 12.

The program uses an evidence-based model and tools to work with families to assess the situation and identify the greatest areas of neglect.

It works in partnership with families to determine goals and improve parenting skills and knowledge, or to help families overcome the barriers that stop them using their existing parenting skills and knowledge.

“To our Aboriginal families where English is their second or third language, we often explain it like this: it is a program that will work with you big mob time to help you have a strong family who can grow your children up strong, making sure they

always have good tucker, go to school, feel safe and are healthy and happy,” says Megan Brown, Program Manager at Save the Children NT.

Under the IFSS program, trained workers spend extended periods of time — at least three times a week for a few hours at a time — with families in their homes and local communities to identify areas that require improvement, as well as develop and enhance their parenting skills.

IFSS workers may support families in this manner for up to 12 months if required.

Save the Children’s IFSS program runs across four sites: Wadeye, Darwin Urban Suburbs, Darwin Urban Aboriginal Communities and Palmerston Urban Aboriginal Communities.

In addition, Good Beginnings Australia runs the IFSS program at two other NT sites, Palmerston and Katherine, while Piliyintinji-ki Stronger Families section of Anyinginyi Health Aboriginal Corporation delivers the program in Tennant Creek.

Save the Children’s IFSS program has been running for two years, and has assisted 31 families and up to 100 children during this time. Save’s IFSS is currently working with 21 families and 70 children in total across their sites.

“The IFSS Program is making a difference in our communities in regards to neglect,

but it is a slow process because sustainable change takes time,” says Megan.

“Some of our families who have exited the program have done so having reduced the risk in their family and improved the neglect outcomes for their children. These parents have improved their parenting skills and capacity to meet the needs of their children.”

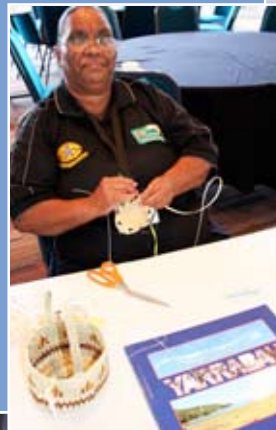
Under a workforce development strategy developed by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the IFSS family support workers have completed a Certificate IV in child, youth and family intervention delivered by BCA.

“This has been great for our front line Aboriginal staff that often haven’t had the opportunity to get formal qualifications,” says Megan. “They graduate with a formal qualification and with more confidence and belief in their abilities.”

The IFSS is funded by FaHCSIA in partnership with the Office of Children and Families, and Parenting Research Centre.

Megan says the IFSS program had received great support from the Parenting Research Centre: “Working with the PRC has been a fantastic experience and has helped us focus on client outcomes and barriers to the implementation of the program across all levels of the organisation.”

# Snapshots from the Fifth SNAICC National Conference





# Gundoo makes learning fun for children



ABOVE: Three-year-olds times four at the Gundoo Day Care Centre — (from left) Dannii-Ella, Loris, Jacob and Janicia.

**Director Jacquie Tapau and her team at the Gundoo Day Care Centre are continually striving to better prepare their children for school life, and everything that follows.**

Situated in the small community of Cherbourg in south-east Queensland, the Gundoo centre is taking every measure it can to improve the education they provide. The centre is currently licensed for 81 children (aged between six weeks and five years), with 15 staff members looking after their needs.

Jacquie Tapau recently spent some time on a practical placement at the neighbouring Cherbourg State School, as part of a teaching degree she is in the process of completing.

Through her time with the pre-prep classes, Jacquie learnt some valuable tools and philosophies she plans to implement at Gundoo.

Her time at the school highlighted the importance of early childhood education in helping children transition to school.

“People see Gundoo as a child minding centre but it’s a lot more. It’s a child education centre,” Jacquie said.

“The first five years of a child’s life is critical. They’re sponges. They soak up everything in the first five years and it prepares them for a life of learning.

“If they don’t get the learning they need before they start pre-prep, the work they’ll do at school is hard. They play catch up and the joy of learning is lost. That’s the worst thing that can happen.

“We want our kids to enjoy their learning so they can enjoy life.”

Apart from learning their ABCs, Jacquie says day care is fantastic for building children’s social and emotional wellbeing.

Youngsters learn to interact with other children, take turns, handle conflict in an acceptable manner, be independent, and have adults who act as great role models.

In the last few years the education landscape in Queensland has undergone change, due in part to the introduction of the new national curriculum.

Pre-prep students — most between four and five years of age — now learn the sounds of letters, number recognition, sight words, colours, and how to write their names; concepts that, in the past, were learnt when children were one to two years older.

Jacquie was so impressed by the experience she plans to develop a partnership between the school and Gundoo centre.

“It has a high expectation of the children and we need to incorporate the same attitude,” she says.

Planning is under way to have the Gundoo Day Care Centre staff spend time in the pre-prep classes and use what they learn in their own work. The centre is even considering changing their name to the Gundoo Early Learning Centre.

Among the changes, Jacquie has not lost sight of the need to make learning an enjoyable experience for children at Gundoo — as well as her staff.

“The staff say any negative feelings

Cherbourg is 250 km north-west of Brisbane, and 6 km from the nearest township, Murgon. Cherbourg has approximately 1300 people, and is nestled among the gum trees and other native forests. The community was established back in 1904 as Barambah Aboriginal Reserve, but is now under local government known as the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council.

The main clan is Wakka Wakka, with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clans and peoples making Cherbourg their home.

they might have (away from work) just go ‘swish’ and melt away,” says Jacquie.

“I think it’s because of the children’s innocence — they don’t see bad, colour or anything.”

She says staff feel rewarded by seeing the children thrive and achieve as they complete fun activities, including painting, collage, singing, reading, playing and story telling.

All Gundoo staff have a Certificate III in childcare and many are working towards, or have, a Certificate IV, Diploma or teaching degree.

“The staff we have are role models within our community and work to make a difference,” says Jacquie.

“What they do prepares our children for a stronger, smarter future that will make this community happier.

“It’s what makes this job so worthwhile.”



ABOVE: Former and current SNAICC staff who worked on the online resource for carers: (from left) Sharon Roussos, Joanne Borg, Tatiana Doroshenko, Emma Sydenham and Carla Aloise.

## More online support now available for carers

**SNAICC launched an exciting new online resource during NAIDOC Week: a website that provides support for carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in out-of-home care.**

The 'Supporting Carers to Care for Our Children' website aims to ensure that culture remains central in lives of children in out-of-home care. It has been designed with a focus on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP).

The first resource of its type in Australia, the website is designed to support and empower carers in their day-to-day role of caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Interactive and easy to navigate, the website provides accessible and targeted information, practical advice and activities, as well as links to further supports.

Information on the website is provided under five subheadings:

- **Looking After Yourself** — supplies carers with information regarding support, self care, further development, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures.
- **Rights of the Child** — a guide to the rights of children in out-of-home care, including a breakdown of legislation and court processes, and resources

A new website has been developed to support carers in their day-to-day caring role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by providing practical information and advice.

such as cultural care plans and planning access to family.

- **Value and Respect Culture** — a collection of resources to help ensure culture is valued and respected. Pride, self esteem, cultural protocols, and a connection and understanding of culture are all covered in detail.
- **Children Thrive with Their Culture Alive** — provides information on a range of cultural topics, such as child rearing practices, healing, wellbeing, and growth and development, intended to help nurture and encourage culture.
- **Fun and Learning** — lists recreational activities, scholarship programs, and leadership and mentoring opportunities.

'Supporting Carers to Care for Our Children' is a large and comprehensive resource. SNAICC Resource Officer Joanne Borg, who took the lead role on the project, said she was thrilled to launch the website in NAIDOC Week.

Jo said the website — an evolving resource that will be constantly updated — has great potential to support and empower carers, as well as professionals in the sector.

"We hope that it will help carers to become more active players in realising better outcomes for our children in out-of-home care by considering the information provided, engaging with the activities — and choosing to take the rewarding journey of becoming a culturally-competent carer," Jo said.

"The information on the website aims to increase an understanding of why culture is of vital importance in the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"We would like to thank the many carers and professionals from communities across Australia who provided their feedback and input into the resource while we were developing it."

'Supporting Carers to Care for Our Children' can be accessed via the SNAICC website: [www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/](http://www.supportingcarers.snaicc.org.au/)

A fridge magnet promoting the resource is also available — please contact Jo Borg on (03) 9489 8099.

It has certainly been a very exciting time for the SNAICC training program over the past few months, since I last wrote. I am no longer alone in the program with the appointment of two new staff members.

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Nat Loadman into the role of National Training Officer. Nat will be based in the Aboriginal Family Support Services office in Adelaide and will predominately be involved in the delivery of the *Through Young Black Eyes* train-the-trainer package.

Nat is a proud Bundjalung man who was born in Grafton NSW and moved to Adelaide in 1999. Nat is an active member within his community and has worked extensively in a voluntary capacity, supporting Aboriginal programs in remote, and the greater metropolitan areas of Adelaide.

Nat's community involvement has primarily been directed towards working with disadvantaged, vulnerable and disconnected at risk youth. Many of whom have adverse experiences with alcohol and other drug misuse, domestic dysfunction and offending behaviour.



Bec Boss

Nat's vision is to empower youth to make positive lifestyle choices that are sustainable in their individual environment. I welcome Nat to SNAICC, and am confident that he will be an asset to our small team.

I am also pleased to welcome Grace Brown into the role of National Training Support Officer. Grace has just completed her Bachelor of Social Work at RMIT and has a keen interest in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to help end the cycle of disadvantage.

Grace's role will largely involve the logistical coordination of the upcoming

training in NSW, as well as conducting the follow-up evaluations and support.

I have also been very busy working on establishing a new mentorship model to compliment the existing *Through Young Black Eyes* (TYBE) training.

Following the recent implementation of the TYBE project funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, it has become apparent that further and ongoing support is needed for communities undertaking this training.

SNAICC do not currently have the capacity to provide follow-up support to each individual participant that attends training (often up to 20 per training). SNAICC recognises the need to support self-determination and capacity building of the communities that we visit and train. We propose a 'mentor-the-mentor' program as the most viable option to sustain ongoing development and implementation of the TYBE training.

This is a very exciting project for SNAICC. I am hoping to have this model developed and ready for delivery mid next year — I will make sure to keep you posted.

Until then, stay deadly!



LEFT: The new training team: (from left) Grace Brown, Nat Loadman and Bec (The) Boss.



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

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relevant organisations for current information concerning their activities.

Line art by Ikanbala (Richard McLean).

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# Sustainable funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services

Have you written a message of support on one of these?



**SNAICC has been conducting research, consulting with services and lobbying the Australian Government over the last 12 months to confirm sustainable and adequate funding for integrated community-controlled children and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across Australia.**

These efforts concern both the Budget Based Funding (BBF) services and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs).

The three different focus areas of this project are:

- **Research:** Research briefs are currently being developed on the impact of these services and their significant cost-benefit for outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. SNAICC has developed a survey to collect the data for the briefs.

There has been great response so far, with approximately thirty services participating. If your service would like to be involved please contact us on the e-mail provided below.

- **Funding program:** SNAICC is working with Deb Brennan from the Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW, to refine a holistic and sustainable funding program that would enable services to respond to children and family needs in their community.

- **Local mobilisation and strong collective leadership:** SNAICC has recently sent out 80 postcards to most of the 337 BBF services and 38 ACFCs. These postcards call for 10 years' commitment to adequate funding for integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services.

All community members are encouraged to write a message of support for their service outlining, for example, why the service is important and unique, its value in the community, or even put on a picture that shows us the importance of the service, and to send the postcards back to SNAICC.

These postcards are designed to build momentum and visibility of the issue, and to support communities to present their voice directly. The postcards will be collected and presented to key ministers and hopefully the Prime Minister after the election, along with a more consolidated proposal. The messages we have received on the postcards so far present a powerful case for the services. Keep the postcards coming! And let us know if you need some more.

Any other people or organisations that would like to complete the postcards, please let us know!

Long-term funding of services is a fundamental issue for SNAICC. These services have been a bedrock of communities, in some cases for decades.

As a Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre representative told SNAICC: "I don't think we've ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community."

Similarly, Wayne Griffiths from Winaga-Li ACFC in Gunnedah, NSW, said recently: "Winanga-Li has 14 Aboriginal families employed at the centre...(the) positive impacts (of this) are seen across those families — this contributes to generational change. Children see that they want to work here."

Whether it is for one month or 10 years, making a difference in the life of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is what it is all about. It is time that these services are valued, recognised and adequately supported for the critical role they play as development engines of communities, nurturing the health, wellbeing and development of children, and supporting families to raise their children strong, healthy and proud of who they are.

For further information please call SNAICC on (03) 94898099 or e-mail Emma Sydenham (emma.sydenham@snaicc.org.au).