



A passionate voice for change

A BRIEF HISTORY OF
SNAICC 1983–2013



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Celebrating
**25 YEARS
 OF NAICD**
 1988-2012

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





A BRIEF HISTORY OF
SNAICC 1983–2013





Since its creation in the early 1980s SNAICC has been a passionate national voice representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.



A PROUD HISTORY OF ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

As a peak national body, SNAICC has sought to inform and influence government policies, raised awareness of the issues and needs of its member organisations and produced high-quality resources to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC's creation was inspired by 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and into child protection systems.

In the late 1990s SNAICC broadened its membership to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early childhood services, advocating on their behalf and providing practical support to them and other services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

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

SNAICC's policy, advocacy, resources and training work has also focused on improving cultural competence in agencies developing policies or delivering services for Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and those working or coming into contact with our children and families.

In the past 30 years SNAICC has worked to make a difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and in raising awareness of the issues they face. With and on behalf of its members, SNAICC:

- was the driving force in the establishment of the national inquiry into the Stolen Generations
- has participated in a number of other major inquiries, including the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and various inquiries into child protection systems at the state-territory level
- has lobbied and lodged numerous submissions to governments to inform, influence, change or develop policies and programs for Indigenous children and families
- has advocated for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, which is now enshrined in all jurisdictions; and promoted the importance of cultural competence in policy-making and delivery of programs for Indigenous children and families
- in 2003, highlighted serious failures in the NT's the child protection system and in 2010 had an important role in the inquiry into that system and in overseeing the implementation of recommendations

- has produced and distributed high-quality cultural resources, and delivered related training, for community-controlled services and other agencies working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- has secured the crucial engagement of mainstream peak agencies in the community services sector — to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business their business — and formed productive partnerships with many of these agencies over the years
- has held national events — such as National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day and national conferences — to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and raise awareness of major issues faced by children, families and communities, and
- has highlighted the issues facing our children and families at numerous United Nations forums and influenced the development of relevant UN instruments.

Former chairperson Muriel Bamblett says SNAICC has had the ability to provide an informed voice and meet the needs of multiple stakeholders across Australia. She says SNAICC has delivered on outcomes for government and met the complex and diverse cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families across Australia.

The expertise and knowledge of SNAICC's National Executive members has played a crucial part in its success, according to Muriel.

"It is important that Aboriginal people have a voice at the table and that those Aboriginal people advocate. But it's also important that that person knows their community, knows their sector, knows their service," Muriel says.

Current SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams, who has been on the National Executive since 1999, says:

"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.

"And I think over the last 30 years there have been some incredible changes. I think in some areas we think we're marching up and down, but in actual fact things have changed.

"When we look back to see how far we've come, we have made huge progresses in terms of supporting our children, appropriate access to preschool and education, and opportunity to speak out in terms of early intervention and prevention."

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE: SETTING THE DIRECTION

SNAICC is governed by a National Executive, comprising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives drawn from child protection and early childhood services across the nation.

National Executive members — who serve on a voluntary basis — provide expertise and information on issues at the state-territory level, set the policy direction for SNAICC and contribute in a practical way to the breadth of SNAICC's activities.

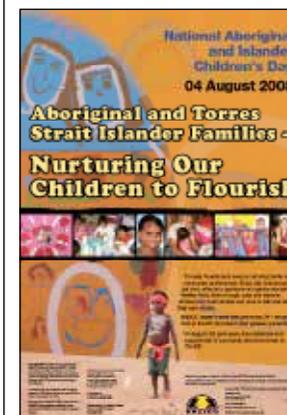
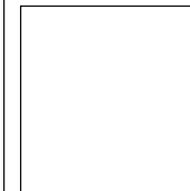
"All our work — all our projects, all our policy development, everything — requires that we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input: from community-based services, our members or non-members," says current CEO Frank Hytten.

"So we are constantly trying to gather information from the grassroots, from the sector, and feed it through the system to both non-government organisations and government."

SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Desley Thompson says a key to SNAICC's work has been the "authenticity of the information received from its members, then filtered up through to the national body."

"We try and maintain that grassroots information to guide us in our work. And then we know that this is what people actually want out there. And if you don't have that community ownership around anything, you come up against a lot of brick walls.

"Whereas, if you've got the community ownership, it just helps along the way. It's so much better that way."





SNAICC's creation in the early 1980s can be traced to the rise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled legal and health services during the 1970s.



SELF-DETERMINATION IN ACTION: THE BIRTH OF SNAICC

These services were an expression of self-determination — in response to a failure of mainstream agencies to deliver appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — and were soon followed by the creation of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs).

The impetus for the establishment of AICCAs was the need to respond to a pressing and serious issue across Australia: the high number of Aboriginal children that were being removed from their families and fostered to non-Aboriginal families.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was created in 1976 following the first Australian Conference on Adoption, at the University of NSW. The forum identified a clear link between Aboriginal adults in the criminal justice system and having a history of fostering, adoption, or institutionalisation.

Two Yorta Yorta women responsible for the establishment of VACCA — Mollie Dyer (pictured right) and her mother Marjorie Tucker — would be active in forming SNAICC five years later. Mollie had been inspired after travelling to Canada and the United States and witnessing the success of distinct child welfare programs and legislation in meeting the needs of First Nations peoples.

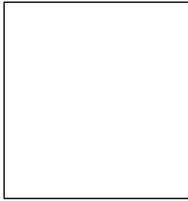
VACCA led the way for other AICCAs, including the Aboriginal Children's Service in Redfern, the South Australian Child Care Agency (SACCA) in Adelaide, and agencies in Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Perth, Alice Springs and Darwin.

In 1979 the First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar — convened by VACCA — was held in Melbourne, attended by over 200 delegates representing Aboriginal communities from across Australia and senior policy staff from state and Commonwealth agencies.

According to current VACCA CEO and former SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett, the seminar “marked a turning point in the application of child welfare policy and practice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.”

Among a number of recommendations, seminar delegates called for a national umbrella organisation to represent the interests of the emerging AICCAs across Australia, help establish new AICCAs and promote information sharing and collective action.

It would be based on the model and philosophy of the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, which was created in 1974 as the umbrella body for Aboriginal Medical Services.



The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care was formed in 1981, elected its first national executive in 1982 and officially opened its doors in 1983, after receiving its first funding from the Federal Government.

Muriel Bamblett says a number of Aboriginal advocates should be acknowledged for playing significant roles in SNAICC's creation.

"There were a lot of people, like Margaret Ah Kee, Raline Yui and Jenny Pryor. Obviously I couldn't go without mentioning Brian Butler and his influence and the 16 years he put into SNAICC. There are clearly people like Alf Bamblett, Lionel Bamblett, Marge Tucker, Graham Atkinson, Aunty Val Weldon, Eric Kyle and Eileen Gwen from South Australia that also deserve acknowledgement.

"And there were people like Peter Horowa from Redfern Aboriginal Children's Services who had such a strong commitment, and all of Peter's family were heavily involved."

Brian Butler is acknowledged as a driving force in the establishment of SNAICC — he was critical in rallying the emerging AICCAs to come together as a national body — and was a central figure in the first 15 years of SNAICC's existence.

Brian was elected its inaugural chairperson, a position he held in two

terms from 1982 to 1997. He says two people deserve special recognition for their efforts in creating the new body: the late Mollie Dyer and her mother Marjorie Tucker, who had also driven the creation of VACCA and supported Brian to set up the South Australian Aboriginal Child Care Agency in the mid-1970s.

"There were a whole host of (other) people responsible for the launching of SNAICC," says Brian. "John Austin was there, Alf Bamblett was there ... there were a whole range of people from around the states. Jenny Pryor and Margaret Ah Kee from Queensland. There were people from every state who played a major part in community work, particularly with the children."

According to Brian, the history of SNAICC started well before the creation of community-controlled organisations in the 1970s. Brian recalls the efforts of concerned individuals who, before the emergence of formal organisations and networks, battled to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care issues.

He talks of the importance of the preliminary work of these community members — many of whom have passed away — often done in isolation "without phones and without the ease of networking which now occurs."

SNAICC began as a small operation, with Marjorie Thorpe given the job of SNAICC National Coordinator working out of the VACCA office in Brunswick St, Fitzroy. Marjorie was joined in the 'SNAICC pit' in 1984 by Nigel D'Souza, who became SNAICC's Executive Officer in 1985.

Located in Fitzroy North, SNAICC today has an administrative team of some 18 staff, supported by students, interns and volunteers.

SNAICC has a National Executive of 20 members from every state and territory, and a member base of 241 organisations and some 3,500 subscribers.



A SOLID PLATFORM FOR SUCCESS

According to Brian Butler, it was the quality of its inaugural representatives that laid a solid foundation for SNAICC's initial survival and subsequent longevity and success.

"We had no trouble in getting the Aboriginal and Islander community including the Torres Strait community to support the setting up of SNAICC. Because they could see the sincerity in the members ... we came to develop SNAICC from a background whereby the community had to condone what we were doing. The community had to have faith in the people they were sending forward to represent them."

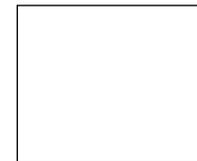
"Molly and her Mum, and Aunty Marg Tucker, and Mum Shirl from New South Wales and all of those old ladies and some of the men who were involved in the child care programs in their respective states, in those early childhood services programs, they had that respect too of the community. They had the respect of politicians as well. Because they were involved, because they were known, because they were supporting us, we then were able to forge ahead and build SNAICC."

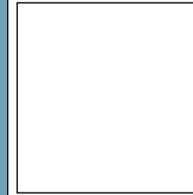
Brian and Muriel agree that the quality of SNAICC's administrative staff has also contributed to its sustained success.

"(In 1985) Nigel D'Souza was engaged to run the office. And, really, Nigel was one of the key people to develop the SNAICC office and the SNAICC machine as such... because he was able to go to all the child care agencies throughout the country, state to state, and get a plan ... of how we were going to be doing our national business with the politicians in Canberra, and how we were going to translate our arguments and needs from the Commonwealth through to the state bureaucrats and government," says Brian.

Says Muriel: "People like Julian Pocock, who was previous CEO, Nigel D'Souza — they really put a lot of work into SNAICC. So there's been a lot of people over the years that have contributed. There's also been a lot of people within government that had a serious commitment. I think about former (Fraser Government) minister Margaret Guilfoyle as one of the first people in the government that supported the AICCA's. And so, you can thank many people for the journey that SNAICC was on."

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SNAICC was at the heart of a watershed moment in the reconciliation process in Australia: the 1990s inquiry into the systematic forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.



TOOK THE CHILDREN AWAY

SNAICC was the first agency to highlight the need for a national inquiry into removal practices over many decades in the 20th century that had seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children separated from their families and placed in institutions and with non-Indigenous families.

The harrowing experiences of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families — that became 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.

“At that time there was an absence of voices around the impact of removal on children and adults.”

“And so SNAICC was the voice of the Stolen Generations at the time.”

Former SNAICC CEO Julian Pocock says the experiences of the Stolen Generations “rose from being a story that was known in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to a story that was known across the country.”

“On the day of the launch of the 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.”

Brian Butler explains that SNAICC representatives were relentless in their pursuit for a national inquiry, as early as 1990.

“We went to a national Labor party congress or conference in Canberra. We got a room at the same hotel where the Labor party were having their conference. Eight or 10 of us lived in that one room, above all to the politicians, so we could have access to (Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) Gerry Hand and all those fellas.

“And we all went to work on the politicians trying to convince them that it was going to be the right thing to set about having an inquiry for the reasons that I talked about — having the child placement principle acknowledged and enforced throughout this country.”

The push gained momentum when SNAICC resolved at its national conference in 1992 to demand a national inquiry.

The inquiry was established by the Australian Government in May 1995 and conducted by Sir Ronald Wilson, President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and Mick Dodson, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.

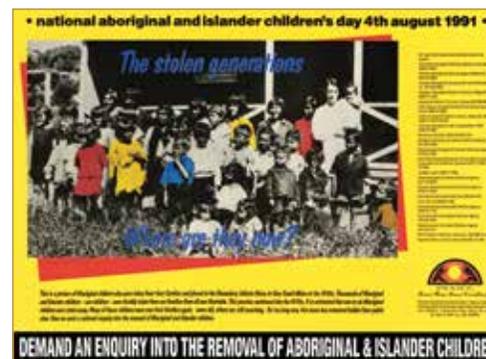
The inquiry's 1997 report, *Bringing them Home*, contained 54 far-reaching recommendations. However, to the great frustration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and agencies, very few of the recommendations have been implemented and to SNAICC continues to advocate with governments to change this.

The inquiry would also lead, between 1997 and 2001, to every state and territory government formally apologising to victims of child removal policies. In 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a historic national apology in Federal Parliament, an act recognised as vital in the healing process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"If it wasn't for SNAICC efforts in relation to the Stolen Generations and the national apology...it's hard to think of something bigger than that in the last 20 or 30 years that has really impacted on the consciousness of pretty much everyone in Australia," says Julian Pocock.

"And that wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for SNAICC. It needed others as well, but if SNAICC wasn't leading that charge and part of a mix of agencies that were pushing it — it would not have happened. And it doesn't get much more significant than that."

The experiences of the Stolen Generations "rose from being a story that was known in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to a story that was known across the country."



THE WORK CONTINUES...

Over recent years, Australia has made significant strides as a society to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and set the platform for reconciliation and change, mostly publicly through the national apology.

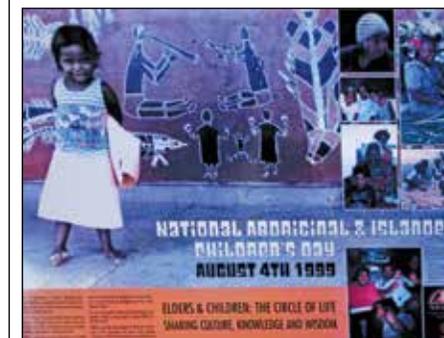
However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to be removed from their families at an alarming rate — a rate so high, fears have been expressed that Australia might be witnessing another Stolen Generation.

At 30 June 2012, more than one third of the 39,621 children in out-of-home care were Aboriginal and-or Torres Strait Islander — although they comprise only 4.6 per cent of the national child population — and they were eight times more likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect.

SNAICC's work continues to see a reduction the dramatically high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

SNAICC is leading a National Coordinating Group to drive a national response to this serious issue. The group comprises representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, the NSW peak body AbSec, Queensland Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), Families Australia, and the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

Delegates at SNAICC's Fifth National Conference in Cairns in June 2013 unanimously endorsed the national initiative, which aims to halve the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 2018.





A defining issue for SNAICC since its inception has been to advocate to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed into the child protection system remain connected to family, community and culture.



KEEPING CHILDREN CONNECTED WITH FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle has been developed, over the past 30 years, from an understanding of the devastating impacts of past practices of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The principle promotes Indigenous participation in child protection processes (not just placements), on the basis that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the knowledge and experience to make the best decisions concerning their children.

As SNAICC historian Linda Briskman noted in *The Black Grapevine*, the introduction and implementation of the principle from 1980 is a hallmark of SNAICC's advocacy work.

Guidelines for the principle were first developed by the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1980, although Aboriginal delegates had called for action on the issues at a national adoption conference in 1976.

In the same year Mollie Dyer — a Yorta Yorta woman and life long advocate of Aboriginal children, and an instrumental figure in the birth of VACCA and SNAICC — visited Canada and the United States to study programs developed to meet the needs of culturally and socially diverse groups of children.

According to Linda Briskman, Mollie returned to Australia inspired by one

particular program, run by Native American social worker Maxine Robbins of the Yakima Indian Nation, and confident that it could be adapted successfully in Australia.

“(Mollie) noted that in the early years of that program, which was based on a philosophy of maintaining a child within its family and supporting the family as unit, not one Indian child was removed from the Reservation, compared with previous removals of 35 to 40 children per year,” Linda wrote in *The Black Grapevine*.

In the early 1980s SNAICC, along with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) and other community organisations, lobbied to have the child placement principle endorsed.

Former CEO Nigel D'Souza says a turning point was getting Federal Government engagement on issues around the welfare of Aboriginal children. He recalls a letter in 1984 from the then Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Clyde Holding, to state and territory governments threatening Federal intervention and national legislation “if they didn't enough in relation to Aboriginal children, specifically the Aboriginal placement principle.”

Nigel says SNAICC lobbied social welfare administrators and the Council of Social Welfare Ministers, which culminated in the council endorsing the principle in late 1984.

He says that, even with that crucial endorsement, SNAICC continued with its demand for national legislation over the following years. In 1993, SNAICC made the call in a report written by Nigel titled *Aboriginal child welfare: framework for a national policy*.

Says Nigel: "So we did a lot of lobbying at that (ministerial) level and I think if you look at their documents as acknowledgement of SNAICC and our role in it, the resolution they passed that states and territories would agree to involve ACCAs on many matters concerning Aboriginal children ... That was result of the lobbying we were doing and we didn't stop at that of course, because we continued with our demand for national legislation."

In 1997, at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Child Survival conference held in Melbourne, delegates called for the ACPP to be implemented in every state and territory.

Now known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, it sets an order of preference for child protection authorities to use in their decision making — on the proviso that decisions must at all times be in the interests of the child.

"It's ensuring that a child will go to family first, and if that's not going to be the case, it is ensuring that the

child remains in the community, and if that's not the case then a child will go to another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family. Again, it's just maintaining that connection to culture and maintaining connection to community as well," says SNAICC Deputy Chairperson Desley Thompson.

"It was a system that wasn't for Aboriginal people. And now we're about driving change, we are saying 'our children need to be safe, our children need early years education'...and we've now got a skilled workforce in those areas."

Importantly, the principle is not just a set of out-of-home care placement priorities. It requires the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure that a child's cultural needs are adequately considered and met at all stages of the child protection process.

Today the principle is enshrined in either legislation or policy in all Australian jurisdictions — due in no small measure to the policy work (including the formulation of a model set of words for the principle) and intensive lobbying of governments over the years by SNAICC and the AICCAs.

Application and nationally consistent reporting of the principle is also listed as an important action item in the Second Action Plan (2012–15) of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020*.

Core elements of the principle are also recognised in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008).

While the principle is embedded in policy and legislation at the state, national and international levels, its full implementation remains an ongoing issue for SNAICC and other peak and advocacy bodies in the child welfare sector.

In 2011–12, almost 69 per cent of Indigenous children in out-of-home care across Australia were placed with relatives/kin, other Indigenous caregivers or in Indigenous residential care. And while this represents an improvement from earlier years, SNAICC is concerned that implementation of the ATSCIPP remains grossly inadequate to promote and respect the rights of our children to remaining connected to family and culture.

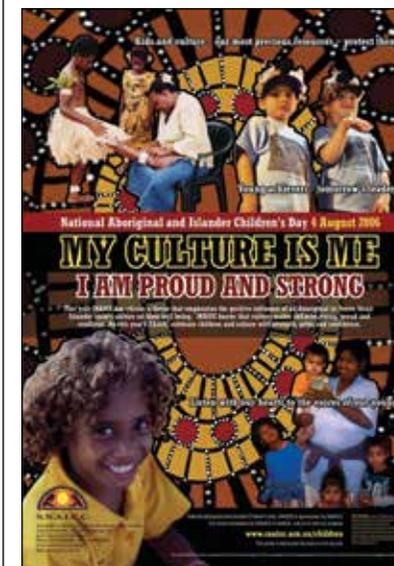
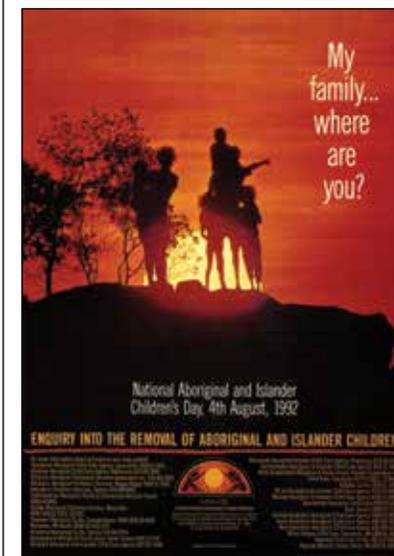
SNAICC is undertaking work to bring clarity to the definition of the ATSCIPP and the detailed measures necessary for its full implementation, as well as continuing to lobby, research and develop resources on the principle.

In 2010 SNAICC successfully lobbied for the development of National Standards for Out-of-Home Care, which aim to ensure all children in out-of-home care are given consistent, high-quality care no matter where they live.

Former chairperson Muriel Bamblett believes the ATSCIPP is one issue on which SNAICC has had a major impact, because of the way it has promoted Indigenous self-determination and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in both the child welfare and early childhood education sectors.

"There's now broader acceptance of the value of early years, of protecting children," says Muriel. "A lot of Aboriginal people are now working in the sector, whereas before very few Aboriginal people knew what it was about."

"It was a system that wasn't for Aboriginal people. And now we're about driving change, we are saying 'our children need to be safe, our children need early years education'...and we've now got a skilled workforce in those areas."



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SNAICC 1983–2013

1970s

Aboriginal community-controlled organisations created in states and territories, including numerous Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs)

1979

First Child Survival Seminar held in Melbourne: delegates call for the setting up of a national umbrella organisation to assist AICCAs

1981

SNAICC Conference Statement of Purpose formulated

1981 to the present

Development of SNAICC policy papers, statements, action plans and priorities to guide the development of policies and programs by government and the non-government sector securing positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

1983

Commonwealth Department of Social Security offers SNAICC recurrent funding, to be auspiced by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

1988

Inaugural National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) — a major event celebrated by communities across Australia on 4 August each year

70

80

00



90

1990

Report on Aboriginal Child Poverty, a partnership between SNAICC and the Brotherhood of St Laurence, identifies poverty as a key factor in child abuse and neglect

1991

SNAICC is the first national organisation to call for a national inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families

Production of *Through Black Eyes* — Family Violence Resource Handbook

1996

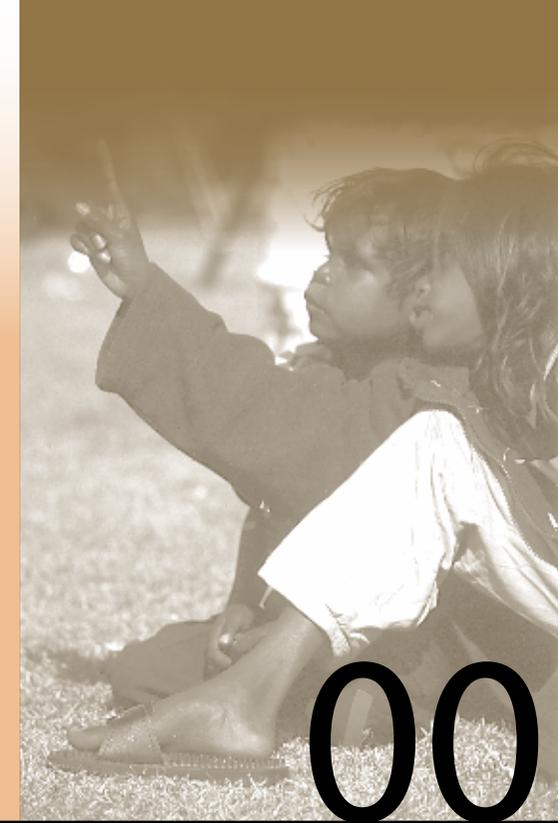
Plan of Action for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities

The only national body to have continuing representation of children's interests on federal government advisory and working bodies from 1996 onwards

1997

First National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Survival conference is held in Melbourne

HREOC National Inquiry Into the Removal of Aboriginal Children Report recommends the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle be legislated in every state and territory



2002

SNAICC's *State of Denial* report is tabled in NT Parliament; the report was the first to open up discussion around child abuse and neglect in communities and led to significant additional resources for the child welfare system in the NT

Through Young Black Eyes Handbook published (updated in 2005, 2007 and 2013)

2003

Convenes Our Future Generations: The National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar with the Commonwealth, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Victorian Government

2004

In a submission to the Australian Government, SNAICC proposes the development of an Indigenous Child Care Services Plan to address the low take-up of child care by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Following consultations with Indigenous communities in 2005 and 2006, the Government publishes the plan in August 2007

2005

SNAICC Resource Service funded to develop and distribute many high-quality resources to support services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (refunded 2008, 2011 and 2012)

SNAICC becomes joint signatory to establish Indigenous Sub-Group of the Non-Government Organisations Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child

2007

Holds Third National Conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and services (Adelaide)

2008

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) and the NSW peak body AbSec endorse the SNAICC Service Development, Cultural Respect and Service Access Policy (2007)

SNAICC celebrates 25th anniversary of Federal recurrent funding

Consolidation and growth of the SNAICC Resource Service

2009

35 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres announced in the Federal Budget (later increased to 38 new centres)

**1998**

Represents the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (also in 2000)

Aboriginal community-controlled early childhood services become full SNAICC members

10**2010**

SNAICC secures funding from Department of Health and Ageing to deliver training and produce culturally-appropriate resources under the KidsMatter Early Childhood initiative

SNAICC presides as Convenor of the Indigenous Sub-Group of the Non-Government Organisations Group for the Convention of the Rights of the Child

Fourth National Conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and services (Alice Springs, NT)

SNAICC's work over many years and intensive engagement this year contributes to securing NT and Federal Government commitments to re-build the NT child protection system — offering leadership to our communities with NGO and government partnerships and support

SNAICC launches its *2011–16 Strategic Plan*

2011

SNAICC granted Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, allowing the agency to seek philanthropic funding and donations

2012

25th anniversary of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

SNAICC wins Highly Commended Award at the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards

SNAICC attends Eleventh Session of United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, and meeting of UN Committee for the Rights of the Child in Geneva

2013

Fifth SNAICC National Conference is held in Cairns. Attended by over 1100 delegates, it considered the biggest forum of its type ever held.





Held on 4 August each year, National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) has become an important part of the calendar. The day celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and cultural pride, and recognises those working with our children and families across the sector.



CELEBRATION OF OUR CHILDREN

NAICD — the only event in Australia specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — has grown each year and has now moved beyond the community-controlled sector to feature the participation of many mainstream agencies.

Celebrations are held in communities across the country for children and families to celebrate this special day — these family activities include open days, arts and crafts, storytelling, face painting, concerts, morning teas and community bbqs. SNAICC also organises a national launch for NAICD, usually held at a different locality each year.

Over the years, the day has also been used to highlight the needs of our children and families and important issues impacting on them. The day has featured some strong political themes, including on the removal of children from their families, child poverty, human rights, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

The first National Aboriginal and Islanders Children's Day was held in 1988 and was set against the backdrop of protests by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their supporters during the bicentennial year.

Former CEO Nigel D'Souza, who joined SNAICC in 1984, recalls how the idea for a national celebration of children came about:

"Leading up to 1988...there were preparations and celebrations

that were going on in the wider community and there was a lot of anger in the community still around that," Nigel says.

"(At the same time) we were trying to work out exactly what to do around children's issues to mark 1988. Mary Graham (an Indigenous academic now living in Brisbane) talked about how there were so many kids in institutions or in orphanages (who didn't know about their birthdays). They used to have just one day where they celebrated birthdays of all the kids.

"So we thought we'd have that one day to celebrate Aboriginal children's achievements, turn it around and to also use the date to focus on any issues that came up around Aboriginal children's needs."

Former SNAICC chairperson Brian Butler believes the day was more about giving children confidence and making them feel special and included.

"We were all aware that our Aboriginal kids, including Torres Strait Islander children, had nothing that they could (to make them) feel that they were being part of society. The first children's day...was a magnificent thing because we could see that children were starting to connect with what we were doing."

NAICD has grown every year, becoming a major event in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community organisations.

Importantly, the day is being increasingly celebrated in the wider community, including early childhood services, kindergartens and primary schools and government agencies.

“A massive win was when the state and Commonwealth governments started to really get behind it and let their departments know about that day,” says former chairperson Muriel Bamblett.

“And so it started to be not just Aboriginal people that were celebrating National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s day, but it started to be government departments with the Commonwealth leading it as well.”

Each year SNAICC produces and distributes resources to help local communities and organisations celebrate the day. In 2013 SNAICC distributed over 8,000 children’s day kits and other resources to assist the 100 or so NAICD events across Australia.



SNAICC CONFERENCES: SETTING THE AGENDA

Since 1997, SNAICC has held national conferences that have helped to set the national agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-related policies and practices.

SNAICC conferences have given representatives from the child welfare sector the chance to share in the success, challenges and goals for increasing the protection, and nurturing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Representatives have included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, delegates from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-run child and family welfare and early childhood services, practitioners, xpolicy makers, researchers and government officers.

In June 2013, SNAICC held its Fifth National Conference in Cairns. With over 1100 delegates attending from around Australia and overseas — and over 70 concurrent sessions, yarning circles and workshops — the conference is regarded as the biggest forum of its type ever held in the southern hemisphere.

Approximately 50 per cent of the conference attendees were from Aboriginal and-or Torres Strait Islander organisations.

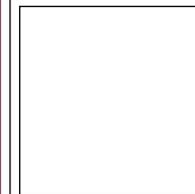
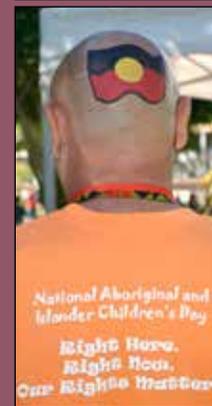
“Conferences are really important (because) they give you a chance to stop and talk with communities and ground the organisation in what needs to be done,” says Julian Pocock, a former SNAICC CEO.

He says SNAICC conferences, particularly in the past decade, have helped to set the national agenda on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families issues policies by getting the child welfare sector together as a whole.

He cites the 2003 SNAICC conference as a landmark event that brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies working in child welfare, early years services, and child welfare bureaucracies from the state and territories.

“It was the first conference where we were really bringing together all those agendas...so we could start to build conversations between the government and non-government sectors around child protection issues,” says Julian.

“Conferences are really important (because) they give you a chance to stop and talk with communities and ground the organisation in what needs to be done,”





In the late 1990s SNAICC recognised the need to expand its membership base beyond child protection services to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations working in the field of early childhood education and care.



HELPING OUR CHILDREN TO THRIVE

“We claimed to be a national body representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, yet so many of the community-controlled agencies working with them were not members of SNAICC,” says Julian Pocock, SNAICC CEO at the time the fundamental shift occurred.

SNAICC’s new members included Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS), crèches, long-day-care services, pre-schools and early childhood education services, as well as family support services, foster care agencies, Link Up and family reunification services, family group homes, and services for young people at risk.

According to Julian, the move enhanced SNAICC’s legitimacy as a national peak body and gave it the mandate to advocate across a number of crucial early childhood issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

He says SNAICC’s National Executive had recognised that the issues of child protection and early childhood were inter-connected.

“In 1998-99 the National Executive said...‘we have to include the early years services and services doing work to prevent the sort of harm that was brining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into the child protection system in the first place.’”

Inaugural SNAICC Chairperson Brian Butler had been active in setting up one of the earliest Aboriginal

community-run early childhood service in Australia — in the early 1970s at Port Augusta, South Australia — and had seen the benefits first hand.

“We decided that we would set up a pre-preschool for our little tiny tots, because none of those children were in the mainstream kindergartens, we didn’t have any children in primary school and certainly no Aboriginal children in high school at that time,” says Brian.

He says the pre-school gave the young children an opportunity to get away from the issues some of the families were experiencing, such as family violence and alcohol abuse, and be taught traditional stories by the Elders — “extremely important for them to start them off in their learning life.”

“Those 30 kids that we had in the first instance went through into mainstream kindergartens after that, went through to primary school. Those whole 30 kids went into high school, so we knew that it worked and we knew that those kids had a good start.”

Current SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams is in no doubt about the impact of SNAICC’s decision to expand its membership base.

“In 1999 our secretariat was very, very small; in the early days were just ACCA services, and then MACS services became part of the secretariat. And so our voice became stronger and our voice needed to be slightly diverse in how we

approached some of our issues, but our portfolio for lobbying was greater," says Sharron.

"We'd gone from a secretariat that was two people to 15 staff, with a capacity to do so much more in terms of how we represent Aboriginal people in Australia."

SNAICC has brought the same strong voice of advocacy that that been heard on child protection issues to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were given access to high-quality, culturally-appropriate early childhood education.

According to Julian Pocock, SNAICC has sought to highlight that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families need services which differ markedly from the mainstream child care model.

"In the mainstream, the main policy driver for child care centres has been to support workforce participation, particularly for women. The market decides where the centres will be built," says Julian.

"Whereas there is a different policy imperative for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that is to invest in multi-functional services that support families to meet their children's developmental needs."

SNAICC and its member agencies have also emphasised the importance of cultural nurturing as a core component of early development and education of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

"Our services give children a solid platform at a critical stage of their lives — helping them to transition to school, to develop their social and creative skills and to become confident young people proud of their culture and identity," says SNAICC Deputy Chairperson (Early Childhood) Geraldine Atkinson.

"They also provide diverse supports to families to assist them to raise their children healthy, strong and proud. "We cannot talk of 'closing the gap' on disadvantage unless it involves the meaningful participation of our services."

Geraldine is chairperson of Lulla's Children and Family Centre at Shepparton, Victoria. Lulla's is one of 33 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) across Australia.

In operation since 1987, MACS evolved out of a desire to redress many of the disadvantageous situations that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children faced, and to ensure that these services were delivered in culturally appropriate ways that prioritised pride and connection to culture, in a way that was lacking in the mainstream system.

In 2000, SNAICC conducted the first national review of the MACS services since 1992, which identified major challenges and produced recommendations on issues such as staffing and training, quality

improvement and accreditation, cultural issues, isolation of centres, and finance and administration. SNAICC has actively lobbied on these issues since conducting the review.

SNAICC was a pivotal force in the creation of the new 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (CFCs) recently established across Australia under a national partnership agreement between the Australian Government and state-territory governments.

SNAICC identified the need for community-based and managed centres delivering holistic family support services in a national child care plan it developed and submitted to the Australian Government in 2004.

Despite the critical role they play, our early childhood services — including MACS and the new CFCs — are under-funded to deliver services and face an uncertain funding future.

SNAICC continues to advocate to work towards a sustainable future, including funding certainty, for early childhood services. It is currently working on a funding model for our community controlled services.

In 2012 the Australian Government introduced the National Quality Framework, designed to regulate and raise the quality of early childhood services across Australia. One area of SNAICC's work focuses on exploring the implications and appropriateness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services of the

National Quality Standard (NQS), a key part of the National Quality Framework.

Current SNAICC policy work is also looking at issues around transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.





In 2004 the Australian Government announced it would provide \$4m in funding to SNAICC over four years to promote the development of educational resources for services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.



SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

“The SNAICC Resource Service came about because we were prepared to broaden the membership base to focus on the early year and child development issues and, secondly, to be the leading agency that engaged with non-Aboriginal agencies around how they worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families,” says former CEO Julian Pocock.

“This meant government was prepared and enthusiastic to significantly improve its investment in SNAICC. So we went from a core funding contract of \$200,000 a year to an extra \$1 million a year for the SRS. This was a big change.”

The funding for resource development marked a major turning point for SNAICC. As well as providing a major financial boost, the funding broadened SNAICC’s role. It changed from a policy and advocacy body to one also delivering practical assistance to the child and family services sector.

Funding for resources has been extended and for the past eight years, the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) has produced high-quality resources and reports used in the child and family services sector, with significant success.

SNAICC resources fill gaps identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, delivering materials that promote a culturally-competent approach to service delivery and build the capacity of the sector to deal with issues affecting our children and families.

The resource service continues to thrive, working in partnership with other agencies to respond to the changing and varying needs of our communities across Australia.

According to former SNAICC chairperson and current CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Muriel Bamblett, SNAICC’s resource service has been able to meet a number of major challenges. These include supporting the diverse cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families living in diverse settings across Australia.

Julian Pocock says SNAICC’s resources have helped to build capacity in a way that privileges the strengths and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and services — knowledge and skills that are of value across the sector, including mainstream services.

“The resources have promoted the intrinsic strengths and value and important knowledge about child rearing, about how to run services well, about how to work with families, about how families look after each other and look after their children that comes from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” says Julian.

“There’s strengths in these Aboriginal services and communities and families and children which everyone should actually be learning from and the way to do the capacity building is to acknowledge those strengths and build on them.”

Two SNAICC resources that typify this positive, strengths-based approach are a series of posters it produced highlighting the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers; and a series of *Talking up Our Strengths* cards celebrating the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

One of SNAICC's most acclaimed resources is *Through Young Black Eyes (TYBE): A Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*.

The handbook was first developed and published in 1992, under the title *Through Black Eyes*, with an updated edition in 2002. In 2008 the resource was expanded to include a workshop manual, a community leaders' guide and other workshop training materials; an update of the kit was published in 2013.

The kit is designed to enable community members to run workshops on family violence and contains suggestions and ideas to help community leaders to take appropriate action to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from family violence and abuse.

Another highly-acclaimed SNAICC resource is the *Working and Walking Together* manual. Published in 2010, the manual supports Family Relationship Services to develop culturally-appropriate practices and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations.

In July 2013, SNAICC launched an important online resource for carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 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.

The website provides accessible and targeted information, practical advice and activities, as well as links to further supports to carers as well as professionals working in the sector.

"There are lots of resources SNAICC has developed around building the resource capacity of the sector, and I think those resources around early years, around governance, around supports... those resources certainly are about capacity building the whole sector," says Muriel Bamblett.

"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 with the sector — that the sector is better engaged because of the work of SNAICC."

Julian Pocock says SNAICC has had another important role: to reach out to mainstream services and "to prosecute an agenda around cultural competence."

This was on the premise that it's the right of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person to enter any service and be treated respectfully and receive a quality service.

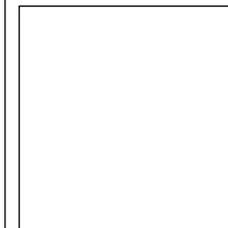
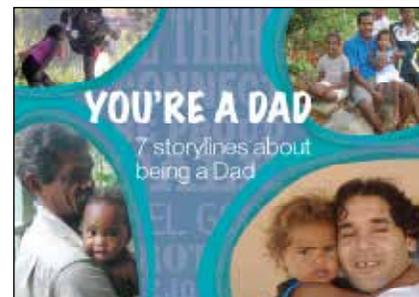
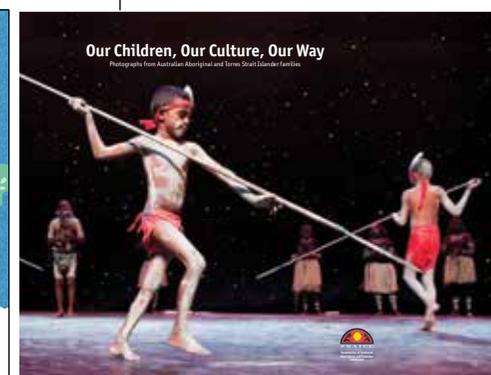
"For that to happen, mainstream services needed to be shown the way and then held to account about how they work with their country's Indigenous peoples," says Julian.

"Today if there's a local child care centre with only four Aboriginal children attending we are in a much better place to resource that child care centre, to know something about that child's experience and enable that centre to respond to all of the needs of that child including their cultural needs."

In recent years, SNAICC has added the provision of training based on its major resources, a training role that is expected to increase significantly over the coming years.

SNAICC training for children and family services includes workshops that help build capacity and confidence in using the particular resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services.

A major current focus is training around SNAICC's most widely used resources, *Through Young Black Eyes* and *Working and Walking Together*. SNAICC is also delivering training for child care workers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with Autism Spectrum disorder, looking at providing basic strategies to support learning opportunities.





NOTABLE CHAIRPERSONS

Eric Kyle (dec.)
Brian Butler
Lionel Bamblett
Muriel Bamblett
Dawn Wallam
Sharron Williams

CEOs

Marjorie Thorpe
(National Coordinator)
Bill Belling
Nigel D'Souza
Julian Pocock
Frank Hytten

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