

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services National Report



**By Debbie Bond
Project Officer
SNAICC**

December 2000

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Children's Services
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S.N.A.I.C.C.
Secretariat National Aboriginal Islander Child Care

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Child care 2000

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Front Cover:

(From Left)

Monic Squires, Alinla Williams and Naomi Bamblett.

Foreword

This short-term report was done over an 18 week period. The bulk of the information gathered was from the MACS services themselves and I cannot thank them enough for all their efforts in such a short time.

The 1996 statistical information in this report was from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I do know that our numbers have increased over time and therefore it's worth remembering the numbers are not up to date figures but do give us a clear picture of where we are nationally around Australia.

I would particularly like to thank SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) for giving me the opportunity to learn more about our MACS nationally and to reinforce the knowledge that we are all different in some ways but also we do share many common issues in the area of early childhood. Thank you Julian Pocock for your valuable assistance.

The other debt of gratitude must go to the staff here at Network SA and ARMSU (Aboriginal Resource & Advisory Support Unit) who have supported me in so many ways. Thank you to Laura Foley (volunteer university student) who assisted most Friday mornings with map drawings. Finally, an acknowledgement and appreciation of the good work that VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated) does in Victoria and also to all the Coordinators and staff of our MACS services right around Australia I say "Thank You" and "Keep up the good work".

Our Indigenous children will have a better future because of you.

Debbie Bond
December 2000

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Appendix

Executive Summary

1 Introduction of the MACS Project

This short-term report is the outcome of a project established by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. A Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) is a child care service funded by the Commonwealth Government as part of the Children's Services Program. MACS are designed to help Aboriginal communities with their child care needs. These needs may differ from those of the general population who use standard child care services. MACS have been established around Australia for quite a few years now and they give our Indigenous children, families, parents and communities valuable and much needed support.

1.1 *Secretariat of the National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care (S.N.A.I.C.C.)*



S.N.A.I.C.C. is the national umbrella organisation of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCA's). It is also the national body for the MACS. It recently received Commonwealth funding to conduct this national review of the MACS.

Over the past 18 months SNAICC has been expanding its membership and role to focus more directly on MACS and other services related to the early childhood development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. During that time SNAICC has amended its constitution to provide MACS and other similar services with full membership of SNAICC. In addition, places have been established on the SNAICC National Executive to facilitate the participation of these services within SNAICC's decision-making processes.

1.2 Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit (ARMSU)



ARMSU is based in Adelaide and was the successful applicant to fill the position of the MACS Project Officer. Further information on ARMSU is on page 70.

1.3 The Position Objectives

To produce a national report on current issues relating to service delivery by MACS, and the child care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families for the consideration of SNAICC and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

The project will be responsible for liaising with the 37 MACS centres and compiling a national report to outline current issues, trends and developments in the provision of child care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The Project objectives are:

- (i) To improve the current information base of both the Department of Family and Community Services and SNAICC in relation to the operation, function, successes and potential ongoing development of MACS by the process of a national review.
- (ii) To inform service planning and delivery within the Department of Family and Community Services in relation to children's services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- (iii) To build upon and consolidate the working relationship between the Department of Family and Community Services, SNAICC and MACS.

1.4 Project Outcomes and Indicators

- Increased understanding and awareness of key issues relating to the ongoing development and operation of MACS at the service level, within SNAICC and within the Department of Family and Community Services and State and Territory Governments.

- Establishment of a solid working relationship between SNAICC, MACS, other children's services, community organisations, local government and the Department of Family and Community Services.
- Indicators are:
 - (i) Documentation and presentation of key issues relating to the ongoing development and operation of MACS.
 - (ii) Improved service delivery in relation to children's services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities using MACS services.
 - (iii) Advice in relation to mechanisms to assist the Department of Family and Community Services Children's Services to deliver the MACS program as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

2 Report Writing, Focus and Content

This report will include information and advice on issues under several key categories. The issues and recommendations are on a state-by-state basis and a national perspective and summary is at the end of the report.

I hope the format of this report is one the MACS and their communities are able to follow and understand. I am also aware that many of our people use varying degrees of Aboriginal English as their first language and I apologize to many others who use Aboriginal English or Australian Standard English as their second language and may need some assistance in reading this report.

2.1 *The report and methodology*

The process of gaining most of the information for this report was via the telephone, fax, e-mail (for the lucky few who had a computer system and e-mail set up) and in some circumstances a "face to face" visit on site or in a large group. The last option to us as Indigenous people is the best form of communicating and gaining an insight into what makes our services operate well/ or not so well.

Information from the MACS themselves was via their Coordinators, staff and in some circumstances members of their management committees/sponsor organisation/board or cabinet members. As mentioned above, some of the child care centres were able to speak to me in person and exchange any issues, recommendations or positive events that have happened to their centre over the last few years. To me, as an Aboriginal person traditionally and culturally this was the preferred means of communication but obviously time and travel commitments could not let this happen with all the 37 MACS around Australia.

In relation to the Victorian report, this project was taken on by VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated). Details in the section on Victoria.

There are also many books, reports and papers that have been written and published around Australia that cover many of our issues and needs of providing culturally appropriate child care for our Aboriginal children. These too have been used and highlighted in this report.

Information was also received from the staff of both the National and State Office Children's Services Section in each State and Territory. Many other Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Commonwealth and State Government funded organisations contributed information towards this national report. Finally, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Organisations were also very helpful. All statistical information and maps came from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

3 Statistical Information¹

3.1 Statistical Profile – Indigenous Population

There are no accurate estimates of the population of Australia before European settlement. Many estimates were based on post-1788 observations of a population already reduced by introduced diseases and other factors. In 1930, the anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown postulated a minimum figure of 300,000. In 1980, L.R. Smith estimated the absolute minimum pre-1788 population at 315,000. Other estimates have put the figure at over 1 million, while recent archaeological finds suggest that a population of 750,000 could have been sustained.

Whatever the size of the Indigenous population before European settlement, it declined dramatically under the impact of new diseases, repressive and often brutal treatment, dispossession, and social and cultural disruption and disintegration (*Year Book Australia, 1994*). The decline of the Indigenous population continued well into the twentieth century.

In the last 20 years, changing social attitudes, political developments, improved statistical coverage, and a broader definition of Indigenous origin have all contributed to the increased likelihood of people identifying as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This is reflected in the large increases in the number of people who are identified as Indigenous in each Census, increases in excess of those which can be attributed to natural increase in the Indigenous population. Table 5.7 shows the distribution of the Indigenous population in 1991 and 1996 and projected distribution in 2001.

5.7 ESTIMATES OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION - At 30 June

State/Territory	1991(a)		1996(b)		2001(c)	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
New South Wales	75,020	26.5	109,925	28.5	121,142	28.4
Victoria	17,890	6.3	22,598	5.9	24,856	5.8
Queensland	74,214	26.2	104,817	27.2	118,749	27.8
South Australia	17,239	6.1	22,051	5.7	24,313	5.7
Western Australia	44,082	15.6	56,205	14.6	61,505	14.4
Tasmania	9,461	3.3	15,322	4.0	16,644	3.9
Northern Territory	43,273	15.3	51,876	13.4	58,364	13.2
Australian Capital Territory	1,616	0.6	3,058	0.8	3,589	0.8
Australia (d)	282,979	100.0	386,049	100.0	427,162	100.0

(a) Estimate based on the 1991 Census of Population and Housing. (b) Estimate based on the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. (c) Projection based on low series, which assumes no further increase in propensity to identify as Indigenous from 1996. (d) Includes Jervis Bay. Source: Experimental Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population (3230.0); Experimental Projections of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population (3231.0)

¹ Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics website.

At 30 June 1996, the Estimated Resident Population (ERP) for the Indigenous population of Australia was 372,052. This represents 2% of the total ERP for Australia. Over half the Indigenous population live in New South Wales (29%) and Queensland (27%). However, the Northern Territory had the highest proportion (27%) of Indigenous people in relation to its total population. This was in contrast to the total of all other States and Territories, where the Indigenous population comprised less than 3% of the population.

Census data presented in this publication show that between 1991 and 1996, the largest increases in the Australian Indigenous population were recorded in the Australian Capital Territory (80%), Tasmania (56%) and New South Wales (45%). The overall increase for Australia was 33%.

The median age of the total Indigenous population was 20 years, compared with 33 years for the total Australian population. For Indigenous males the median age was 18 years and for females, 21 years. The same figures for the total Australian population were 33 and 34 years respectively.

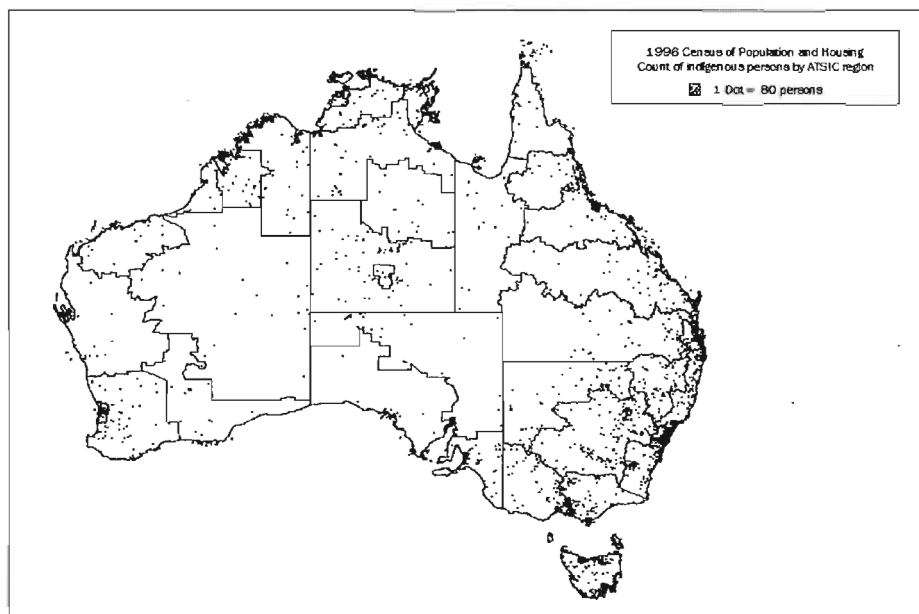
The Indigenous population has a very young age structure. With 40% of the population aged under 15, and 3% aged over 65, it has a younger age structure than that of the total Australian population at the beginning of this century.

This age structure is largely a product of high fertility rates. During the 1960s Indigenous women had, on average, about six children each. By the 1980s this had fallen to about three children each, compared to 1.9 for all Australian women.

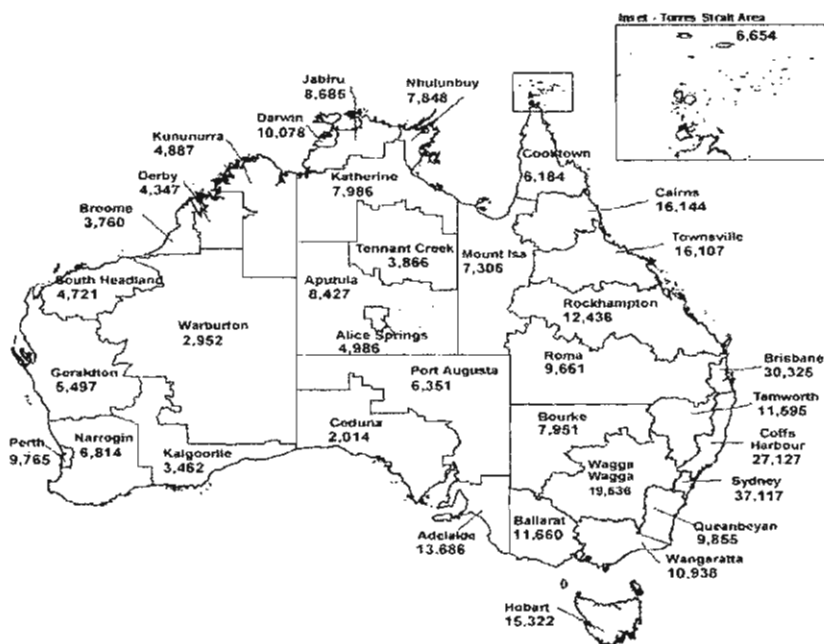
The age structure also reflects high death rates. For the period 1991-96, life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at birth was about 57 years for males and 66 years for females.

While most of the total population is concentrated along the east and (to a lesser extent) the southwest coasts, the Indigenous population is much more widely spread. About 90% of Australia's total population is contained within the most densely settled 2.6% of the continent. About 90% of Australia's Indigenous population live in areas covering 25% of the continent. This partly reflects the higher level of urbanisation among the non-Indigenous population than the Indigenous population. However, Indigenous people are also much more likely to live in very remote areas than the rest of the population. Just over half of the continent contains 0.3% of the total population, and 3.1% of the Indigenous population (see maps following).

3.2 *Distribution of Indigenous People Across Australia*

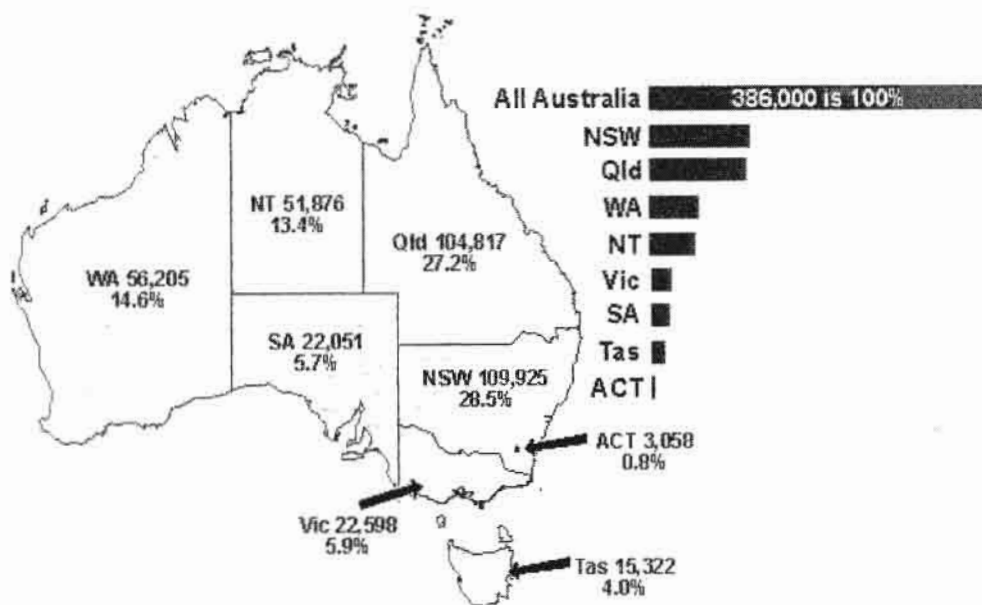


3.3 Distribution of Indigenous Population (a), 1996

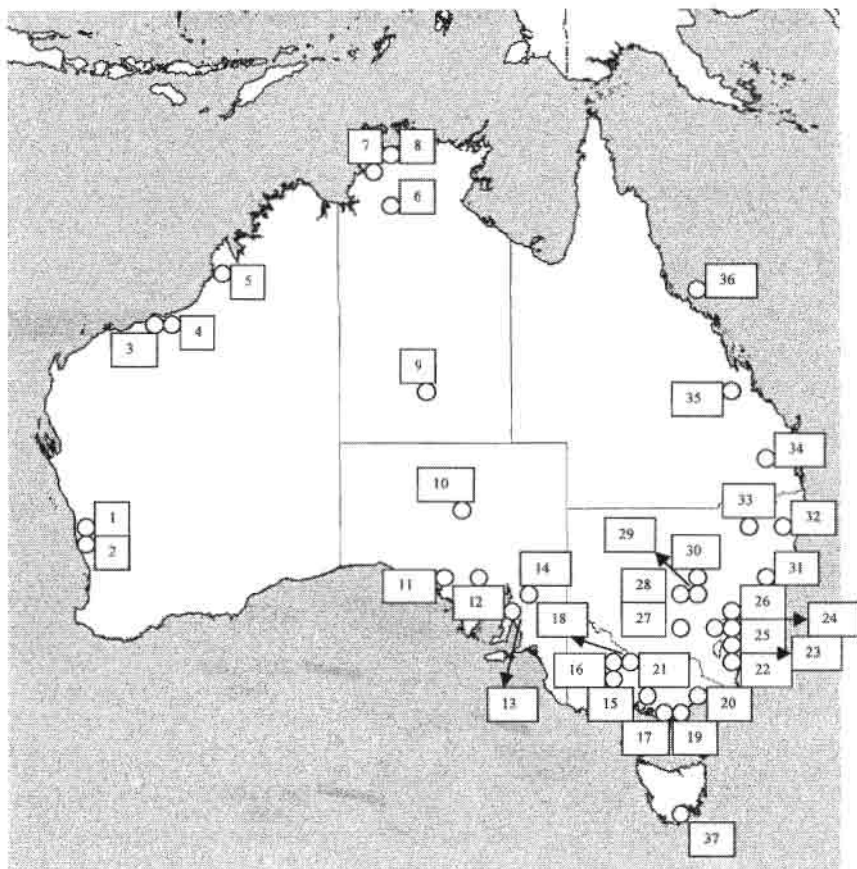


* This map gives you a closer look at our Indigenous numbers spread out within each state and territory. Compare this map with the one on page 10 and you will be able to see where the 37 MACS services are nationally and relate it to the numbers of Indigenous people and also where there might be large numbers of Indigenous people and no MACS services.

3.4 Percentages of Indigenous Population



* The map above will give you the percentages of Indigenous people state by state (on a national level). For example the two highest states in relation to the numbers of Indigenous people are quite clearly New South Wales and Queensland.



This is the map with all the 37 MACS on it. Below are the names of the MACS Centres.

Western Australia

- 1) Perth – Gurlongga Njini MACS
- 2) Thornlie – Coolaboroo Neighbourhood Centre
- South Hedland – Rose Nowers Child Care Centre
- Roebourne – Yaandina MACS
- Broome – Jalygurr Guwan MACS

Northern Territory

- Katherine – Na Wulg Wulg Child Care Centre
- Batchelor – Batchelor MACS Yera Child Care Centre
- Casuarina – Minbani Family Centre
- Alice Springs – Ampe Kenhe Apmere Centre MACS

South Australia

- Coober Pedy – Umoona Child Care Centre
- Ceduna – Koonibba Child Care Centre
- Whyalla – Wynbring Jida MACS
- Adelaide - Kurna Plains Early Childhood Centre
- Adelaide - Kura Yerlo Aboriginal Child Care Centre

Victoria

- Echuca – Barrimba Child Care Agency
- Robinvale – Robinvale MACS
- Morwell – Gunai Lidje MACS
- Mooroopna – Lidje MACS
- Bairnsdale – Brayakoloong MACS
- Lakes Entrance – Bung Yardna MACS
- Thornbury – Yappera MACS

New South Wales

- Wreck Bay – Wreck Bay MACS
- ✓Berkeley – Noogaleek Child Care Centre
- ✓Mt Druitt – Murawina Mt Druitt Ltd
- ✓Matraville – Gujaga MACS
- ✓Campbelltown – Ooranga Wandarrah MACS Centre
- Wagga Wagga –Wiradjuri Neighbourhood Centre
- Cowra – Yalbillinga Boori Day Care
- Bathurst – Towri MACS
- Dubbo – Allira MACS Child Care Centre
- Wickham – Awabakal MACS Child Care Centre
- Kempsey – Ngaku MACS
- Tamworth – Birrelee MACS Child Care Centre

Queensland

- Cherbourg – Gundoo Day Care Centre
- Woorabinda – Undoonoo Child Care Centre
- Palm Island – Gooddo Day Care Centre

Tasmania

- Hobart – Aboriginal Children's Centre

4 Background on MACS

Each state has some documentation on the background of the MACS, but overall this seems to be an area that is lacking in written documentation. The main documentation is a Commonwealth Handbook (the 1996 version) that was designed specifically to explain the following to the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services:

- the aims and objectives of the Commonwealth Government in funding child care services;
- how your service must operate to be eligible for funding;
- what subsidies are available to your service; and
- how these subsidies are claimed.

All the issues above are explained in detail in the handbook.

Information from the MACS themselves, particularly on a national level came from a MACS National Policy Document that was a result of a meeting in Alice Springs in May 1992. A full copy of this document is Appendix A.

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporation (VAEAI) has produced an excerpt of the Policy Document, which provides a national perspective on MACS from the services' point of view. VAEAI have given permission for this excerpt to be included in this report, which appears below.

MACS National Policy - May 1992 2nd Draft Excerpts²

RATIONALE OF MACS

Because most of the centres have as their main service, early childhood care, it is too easy for some to regard these services as preschools. Whilst this is an important function, the MACS services are NOT confined to delivering preschool services and should not be considered in that light.

As its name implies, the word 'multifunctional' gives the MACS centres a much wider scope and encourages a more holistic approach to the well being of children in their care, which should include children from age 0 to 18 and, perhaps, beyond.

² Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) have been in operation since 1987. Obviously, from 1992 the date of that last written documentation, several areas have changed in relation to regulations and licensing, funding and funding accountability, staffing, management roles & responsibilities, size of vehicles needed and all forms of training requirements. However, the roles and principles of MACS in the above documentation should never be forgotten or overlooked. Many of our social issues back then have stayed with us over time and many of our Aboriginal families today, are still living in disadvantaged situations.

It is for these reasons that we do have an opportunity to write in this report what is happening in our MACS services in the year 2000.

THE ROLE OF MACS

It was recognised that many of our children were in a disadvantaged situation due to a number of factors, including widespread denial of their right to a cultural identity, poverty and an educationally deprived background. It was obvious that our children were in great need of support if they were to truly achieve social justice through genuine access and equity and, that a central feature of this support must be recognition and positive reinforcement of their Aboriginality. Aboriginal children have a right to conditions, which are culturally appropriate so that they learn their Aboriginality first. They also have the right to access a system which can nurture and monitor them as they progress through their education and provide them with the best possible chance of equity alongside non-Aboriginals. Clearly, the mainstream centres could not provide such a service, nor could they be expected to. The only way those aims could be achieved was through the development of a separate entity like MACS which would directly address the needs of our children.

PRINCIPLES OF MACS

- 1) Aboriginal children's needs should be met through high-quality programs, which enhance cultural, physical, social-emotional, language and learning development;
- 2) Access to the provision of culturally relevant services must be the right of every Aboriginal child;
- 3) As a right, priority of access to MACS services must be given to Aboriginal children;
- 4) The differing needs of Aboriginal families and communities throughout Australia must be recognised and MACS services designed to be flexible enough to meet this variety of family and community needs. To do this, MACS must maintain and develop its multifunctional approach;
- 5) MACS services should meet the range of needs in the Aboriginal community including children with disabilities and children and families with a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds; programs must be culturally diverse and reflect the particular needs of individual children;
- 6) MACS programs offered should take into account individual children's readiness, and should seek to develop and enhance social and educational skills in accordance with this;
- 7) Aboriginal families should have access to children's services, which are culturally relevant and managed;
- 8) Aboriginal families should have access to a diverse range of multifunctional children's services to meet their needs and those of their children. This must be achieved through the co-ordination of Government and non-Government services to maximise the use of resources and provide a range of Community-identified service options;
- 9) Federal, State and Local Government funding, and staffing formulas for MACS, must reflect recognition of, and commitment to, the maintenance of Aboriginal lifestyles;

- 10) Quality care should be provided to Aboriginal children through the employment of appropriately trained and skilled staff. Aboriginality is a qualification in itself.

FUNCTIONS OF MACS CENTRES

CULTURAL AWARENESS PROGRAMME

In MACS centres, the staff are predominately Aboriginal and the environment is Aboriginal. Thus, just by attending the centre, and being in constant touch with Aboriginal staff, the children absorb and learn about their heritage incidentally. Such incidental learning and experience is supported by an organised program to promote Aboriginality. This directly involves the children in a range of culturally-oriented activities and encourages interaction with other family and community members.

LONG-DAY CARE

This service is provided primarily to ensure that the cultural, physical and social emotional well being of Aboriginal children is catered for. It aims to create a state of readiness so that our children will have the best chance of survival and personal success in a traditional school environment where they have historically been disadvantaged.

Since children attending a MACS centre are largely from a disadvantaged background, extra steps need to be taken to develop positive self-esteem, independence and responsibility and this is accomplished, at least in part, by engendering a strong sense of Aboriginal identity and pride in their heritage. This cannot be done in a mainstream centre because it is not one of the aims of those centres, and also because there are generally no Aboriginal staff there. The staff represents appropriate role models and this is an invaluable service, unique to MACS, which contributes to the development of positive self-image in the children - especially if this is not the situation in the home.

When our children reach primary school, they are subjected to traditional non-Aboriginal values, which are not always compatible with their Aboriginal upbringing. The MACS centres, through their culturally relevant programs, provide a bridge from where the children have come, to where they have to go at the age of five or six: that is, to the local public school. After several years in a MACS program, the children 'know the ropes' and also have a strong and positive feeling for their Aboriginality which gives them the confidence to progress, with less inhibition, toward the achievement of their full potential. This would not necessarily be the case if those children had come straight to school from the home environment or had been cared for in a mainstream centre.

OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE

It is acknowledged that Aboriginal children need to be made ready to cope with life in the Government school system and that this can be achieved through the MACS program. Because the program is for children, and it is the children whose lives are being changed by it, rather than, necessarily, the lives of their parents, it is unreasonable to assume that all parents will be able to offer the necessary, on-going support to their children when they reach school age. Therefore, it is imperative that the achievements of the MACS program are not undermined due to a lack of continued support for the children when they reach primary school age. One way to overcome this problem is to provide after hours care and supervision. This takes the form of educational and recreational activities and homework classes. Participation in such activities outside of school hours perpetuates the positive self image of our children through association with Aboriginal role models and peers. This service also tends to neutralise any negative influences that our children may encounter in the school system and promotes an on going Aboriginal cultural orientation. Another of the 'intangibles' of the Outside School Hours Care program is that because it involves group participation in activities and excursions, it melds in with the Aboriginal culture in as much as this is communal by nature, and therefore reinforces the extended family feeling.

MACS SUPPORT PROGRAM

The role of this worker is integral to the effective functioning and expansion of MACS programs and it cannot be provided for in the context of a mainstream service. Further details regarding the role and responsibilities of the MACS Support Worker, and other staff associated with the MACS Support Program, are outlined below. These should be considered carefully as the National MACS Committee (this information was from the National MACS Conference held in Alice Springs on 18th – 22nd of May 1992 and a full copy is in the Appendix A) has made a number of recommendations in respect to them.

MACS STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

CO-ORDINATOR (Administrator)

This position was formerly called 'ADMINISTRATOR' but the National MACS Committee has proposed that the name be changed to 'CO-ORDINATOR' to more accurately reflect the role and duties of this position. Some of the duties of the CO-ORDINATOR are outlined below:

- Supervision of staff and overall running of the Centre
- Bookkeeping/financial management,
- Register/prepare budgets and financial reports
- Liaison with community and parents
- Attendance at workshops and conferences
- Helping to put together policies
- Organise excursions

- Referral of people e.g. parents and others
- Counselling for parents and community
- Preparation of Newsletters -for parents and the Community
- Check menus & programs of Centres
- Shopping for Centre (weekly & emergency shopping)
- Conduct meetings - parents & staff
- Education awareness
- Report to discuss with Coordinators
- Get involved in community committees and attend these meetings
- Parent interviews
- Enrolment & organisation of waiting list
- Involvement in fund-raising
- Negotiate with staff, parents & community
- Organise training for staff
- Liaise with HFS & other Government Departments
- Enter submissions for funding
- Check maintenance of Centre and vehicles
- Be responsible for safety awareness in the Centre
- Answer the phone
- Be responsible for all health screening of the children
- Write cheques and pay accounts
- Keep insurances up to date
- Liaise with Accountant and Bank Manager
- Purchase equipment and maintain equipment
- Keep inventory of stores
- Make sure the follow-up work is done between children, parents & health worker
- Responsible for legal requirements & responsible to parents & children
- Responsible for reporting incidents of suspected abuse, assault etc.

Apart from the above, the CO-ORDINATOR is in charge of a staff of usually over a dozen workers and this, combined with the financial responsibilities of running the Centre means the position is a very stressful one. This needs to be recognised and compensated for in the level of salary paid.

MACS SUPPORT WORKER

General Responsibilities

1. The primary focus for the Aboriginal worker is to develop an ongoing program, suitable to the needs of Aboriginal children, which is:
 - 1.1 Integrated with the whole program, and
 - 1.2 Apparent across all curriculum areas and throughout all functions of the service.
2. To develop a program in consultation with child care staff.

Specific Responsibilities

1 CHILDREN

- 1.1 To assist Aboriginal children and their parents to use the service during enrolment, settling in periods and ongoing attendance.
- 1.2 To develop teaching and learning practices, which optimise Aboriginal children's self esteem and cultural identity based on principles of self-determination.
- 1.3 To provide care on occasions, as necessary, to the target group.
- 1.4 To assist children, parents, and staff to recognise the specific characteristics of local Aboriginal culture, extended family networks, language, art and religious or spiritual beliefs in order to promote mutual respect and racial harmony.

2 PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- 2.1 To facilitate parent involvement in developing the program and promoting integration, including involvement in management.
- 2.2 To help parents with any other matters involving the child and the centre including referrals to other agencies as appropriate.
- 2.3 To treat all parents with respect regardless of sex, race, religion, culture, language, background or disability.

3 STAFF

- 3.1 To collect, collate and introduce to child care staff resources relevant to an Aboriginal perspective in the program.
- 3.2 To relieve other staff members from the playroom or administrative tasks to enable them to visit Aboriginal resource groups or to attend in-service training relevant to the service's programming objectives.

4 COMMUNITY

- 4.1 To develop strategies to attract potential users of the service from the Aboriginal community.

5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 5.1 To ensure his/her professional development by attending in-service training relevant to the needs of Aboriginal families.

More specifically, the MACS Support Worker has to deal with such crisis support elements as emotional support, accommodation requirements, financial, clothing and nutritional assistance by referral to appropriate agencies.

In order to carry out these tasks, the MACS Support worker has to have sufficient knowledge and resources to address health & early intervention issues such as -

- Hearing
- Sight
- Abuse
- Aids
- Muscular development
- Dental
- Nutrition
- Head lice
- Impetigo
- Immunisation advice
- Disabled children
- Special needs

He/she must be able to provide education follow-up such as -

- Enrolling children in schools
- Orientation for children and parents
- One on one counselling with children as needed
- Consultation with teacher/parents
- Cultural maintenance with the children at school
- Provision of resources/information to parents, teachers and children

Consequently, there is a need for the MACS Support Worker to consistently undertake further training in relevant areas through Government organisations and/or the Community.

BUS DRIVER AND BUS

Because of the backgrounds of most the children targeted by the MACS program, a bus, bus driver and bus assistant are needed to get them to and from the centres. This service also extends to excursions for the entire range of MACS programs. With an entire MACS program in full swing, this facility would be utilised on a much wider basis than it is now.

CAR

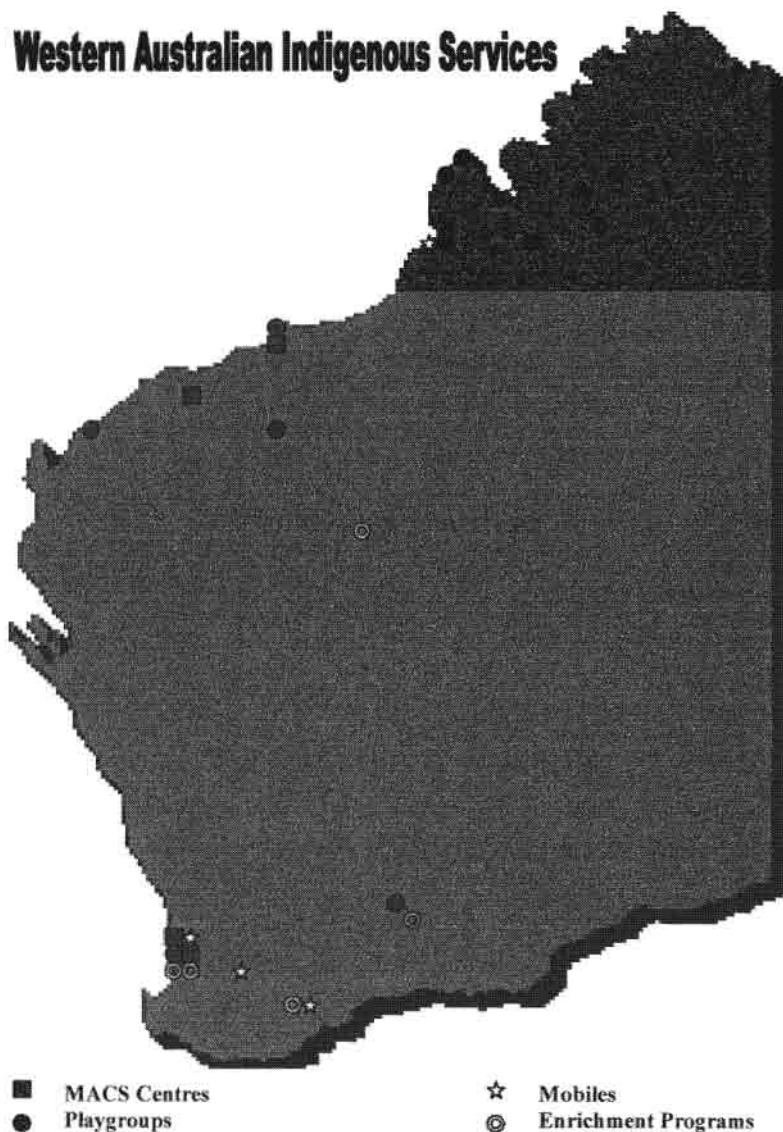
A general sedan or station wagon motorcar is required by each centre to carry out many duties of the CO-ORDINATOR and other staff members as required:

- The MACS Support Worker requires transport to visit clients, take them to agencies and associated emergency work.
- The CO-ORDINATOR needs the car as well to attend -
 - Workshops
 - Meetings
 - Liaison work
 - Banking

- Emergencies such as
 - Deliver children home/to hospital etc ...
 - Take home children whose parents are late picking them up from centres.
-

5 Western Australia

Western Australian Indigenous Services



5.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Western Australia has an Indigenous population of approximately 56,205 people (according to the ABS statistics)

There are five MACS services in Western Australia:

Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre

Parkside Drive
Thornlie WA 6108

Ph: 08 9459-3868

Fax: 08 9493-2994

Licensed for 57

Gurlongga Njininj MACS

Postal:
PO Box 8188
Stirling Street
Perth WA 6849

Location:
386 Lord Street
East Perth 6004

Ph: 08 9228-2428

Fax: 08 9228-2430

Licensed for 28

Jalygurr Guwan MACS

Postal:
PO Box 1836
Broome WA 6725

Location:
Dora Street
Broome WA 6725

Ph: 08 9193-5510

Fax: 08 9193-6171

Licensed for 31 Long Day care

Unlicensed for 20 OSHC and

Vacation care

Rose Nowers Child Care Centre

Postal:
PO Box 2055
South Hedland WA 6722

Location:
Boronia Close
South Hedland

Ph: 08 9140-1293

Fax: 08 9140-1314

Licensed for 36

Yaandina MACS

Postal:
PO Box 228
Roebourne WA 6718

Location:
Lockyer Way
Roebourne

Ph: 08 9182-1248

Fax: 08 9182-1172

Licensed for 14

5.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. Therefore, under each section there may be a difference of opinion on some issues.

5.2.1 Training and Staffing

Common issues from centres

- Not enough qualified Indigenous workers and training is an issue. We have difficulty in attracting qualified staff.
- Due to lack of funding, staff hours have to be managed, changed, shortened, and in some cases jobs are lost.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- Due to lack of funding, our centre has had to put off one staff member and another one had her hours cut back to part-time work.
- We only have one qualified Indigenous staff member at present and we are trying to get more trained.
- We have not had any staff training in the last few years and it is very hard to find Qualified Indigenous child care workers. **(We are not in the rural area either.)**

Centre

- Currently organisations like Batchelor College have special programmes for Aboriginal students but otherwise it is difficult for Aboriginal people to do culturally appropriate training – **should have a scholarship fund to assist in this!**
- We have two staff currently at Batchelor. One is a single parent who works full time, is not eligible for ABSTUDY and the Centre is not able to pay wages while she is away on block study for five weeks. As a result, she may have to defer her placement and this situation is just not fair.

Centre CDEP issues

- There is very little incentive to work to get CDEP (Community Development Employment Program) – especially on the long shifts of child care.
- For remote communities there aren't enough extra and/or top up jobs plus people refuse to work when they can still get the CDEP payment and stay home.

- We have tried to use CDEP to our advantage and increase the permanent employment prospect of Aboriginal people but there are as many variations to the rules as there are CDEP agencies.
- We have tried to encourage Aboriginal people to work in our child care centre but they want the wages plus the CDEP payment as extra. This makes it very difficult and our wage bill remains very high.
- Some people refuse to get CDEP because of the negative inference it has and so we still can't reduce our wages bill.

Positive issues:

- As a local collective the child care services in Broome (long day care, family day care, MACS and community based) got the Lady Gowrie to come and do workshops and training sessions for us all. Thanks to the Children's Service Office help.

Centre

- We have a TAFE college nearby which now runs a child care course and they only have a few students who turn up on a regular basis. The challenge we have in this centre is getting enough of our women and girls interested in doing the course.
- Many of the local girls do not seem interested in working on a regular basis and have difficulty in keeping to time commitments (for many reasons). **The reasons are highlighted in the community issues section.**
- We also have a mixture of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous staff working in our centre and in the area of staff training the non-Indigenous feel that it is important that they have some cultural training and understanding. Perceptions of how children learn can become difficult if you don't have an understanding of Indigenous culture. An example of this is when we look at discipline in our centre. Some of our Indigenous children have very different social skills and can be seen to be very aggressive towards other children. When confronted by our staff they tend to feel threatened and are inclined to "hit first" and ask questions later". This can be a very difficult situation to have for any staff member, but for our non-Indigenous staff with limited knowledge of Indigenous culture it can be twice as difficult. **Cultural awareness training in early childhood is a must for staff.**
- TAFE tried to start a child care course but were only interested in employing someone point 5 to get it all started. They had little response and now have dumped the idea which is a shame because there are at least 10 people in the community who are doing the child care course through Mt. Lawley, Batchelor College and other distance places who could have used the local TAFE instead.

Centre

We already have KAPCS (Kimberley & Pilbara Children's Services) annual training get together which includes staff from Dampier Peninsula, Djarindjin, Lombadina, Derby, Bidyadanga, Beagle Bay, Hedland, Karratha, Tom Price, Mobile Muster – biennial (includes remote Aboriginal services). However a national MACS conference would:

1. Provide support for related issues/share ideas
2. Establish benchmarks
3. Cultural support for staff – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff
4. Face-to-face – mentor selection
5. Shared staff possibilities
6. Incentive for staff to improve work practice to be able to attend as a reward for effort
7. Funding and membership could be used to offer additional funding to students, e.g. Scholarships
8. Affirm staff's level of skill from outside

Our most rewarding Cultural centre is NAIDOL, and we often work with the Kimberley Health Service and Resource Centre (Mamabulunjin) to provide Aboriginal relevant activities in our centre. This often includes Aboriginal elders coming in to sing and tell stories to our children.

Remote area issues:

- Increase funding for traineeships and for travel to Perth for that component of training.
- No study leave provision in WA award.
- Cost of living is high (food, rent and petrol) and then your wages are still low compared to other professions such as tourism (many qualified child care staff work in tourism for the better hours and wages).
- Cultural training – whilst we have Aboriginal staff they're not necessarily 'local' and therefore lack confidence, motivation and contacts to implement culturally appropriate activities in the daily program. They are often however, excellent Aboriginal role models in care and nurturing of 'family' tolerance and positive self esteem.

5.2.2 Administration

Common feedback from centres

- We would like our staff to access all types of training to cover the administration position.
- Computer training and technology is a must for us.
- Support for new Coordinators is a must particularly in the area of administration and fee collection.
- Volunteer Management Committee – huge responsibilities in regard to financial understanding and industrial relations with very little experience and less recognition for efforts.
- Confidentiality often an issue when 'family' are concerned

Specific centres' issues

Centre's positive issues

We are fortunate in our centre to have on board:

1. Main stream experienced long day care Administrator
2. Experienced Book Keeper
3. Very well established and documented accounting procedures from the centre's inception
4. Experienced and knowledgeable Auditor who works with large Aboriginal Corporations and helps us access relevant financial training and workshops

5.2.3 Accreditation

Common issues from centres

- QIAS is not seen as a priority in MACS services due to other community issues that MACS services need to deal with. We have always had a choice in this and would like this system to remain a voluntary one.
- One MACS centre in WA has been made to feel "second class and disadvantaged" because they were not able to apply for a Health and Safety grant purely on the grounds that they were not involved in the Accreditation process.
- If and when we are ready to begin the process of Accreditation we would need a lot of assistance to firstly understand it and then attempt to have a go.
- Another service states that they would first have to overcome difficulties such as high turnover in staff, understanding and support from our management group, travel consideration to gain training and resources and the time and effort it would require to meet the challenge of QIAS.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- The QIAS system is great in theory but in small communities such as ours it can be very challenging to get parent participation, let alone another committee together for another process.
- Other issues that have an impact is if you have a large turnover in staff then this affects the process and can lead to extra, extra burdens placed on the Coordinator's shoulders who usually have a great deal of work anyway.
- We try and run the centre under many of the same principles anyway.

5.2.4 Licensing and Regulations

In the northern region of Western Australia in the remote area, we've been extremely fortunate to have ongoing positive and consistent help and support from the Children's Services Officer. We do however, know she is going to leave and go to Perth and we fear the replacement person may not be as helpful.

Centre

Exemptions are generally needed when we replace staff or require temporary staff for:

- Day and longer term issues (particularly when it involves family issues)
- Annual leave
- Maternity leave and
- Bereavement leave (very important leave for Indigenous communities)

It is very difficult to find replacement staff even after advertising. This is frustrating for centre staff and not consistent for children, very unsettling. One centre spent \$5,000 advertising for staff with very little luck. They simply cannot afford this.

Temporary extended exemptions for rural/remote centres which cannot find replacement staff is needed.

Centre

- Maybe a mentoring system is needed for new Coordinators or Managers of MACS centres. One Coordinator of a centre actually stated that she had to "learn by the sink or swim" method of being a Coordinator. It was very hard and little support. A Coordinator needs to know the licensing rules of a child care centre and also how to apply for any exemptions.
- Training and resources needed for managing staff grievances, staff procedures and industrial advice. Plus, insurance information, staff selections and interview questions, fire drill and procedures.

- Training is also needed in the understanding of licensing/regulation issues pertaining to MACS services.
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations need to be implemented into centres. This area is very important in relation to licensing and regulations.
- We would like to meet the licensing staff on a regular basis and this could happen if we were to have a regular state meeting and invite them along now and then.
- I would like to see the Coordinator being given the authority to make an on the spot decision when needed e.g. taking on an extra child when all the positions in an age group area have been filled but there are vacancies in another area providing you have the staff and don't exceed license numbers.
- Waiting for an exception to come through takes time and may mean a child misses out on care.

5.2.5 Management Committees

Centre

- We want our staff to have management training in all aspects of managing a MACS centre.
- We also have problems getting a quorum at our meetings and feel that there is no real community support for our Centre.
- Our Volunteer Management Committee has a huge responsibility in regard to financial understanding and industrial relations with very little experience.

Centre

- Lack of in-service training for Coordinators and or Management Committees. We don't have a resource and advisory agency to support us with management and Coordinator training.
- Training and understanding the roles & responsibilities of a Management Committee/Sponsor organisation. Information should cover financial management, changing constitutions, running an AGM, legal responsibilities.

5.2.6 Funding for our MACS

Several of the MACS centres in Western Australia had different views on funding and they are listed below.

- The Federal Government is looking to remove some of our funding as newer MACS centres receive little or no Special Services money.
- They should be looking to increase overall funding, not decrease funding.

- Reallocation is good in principle but services like ours have only just been able to survive in recent years.
- Our building is ten years old and we have a huge depreciation liability, high staff turnover and a big waiting list for child care.
- If MACS are to improve their effectiveness, then given the number of people on our waiting list (for over 4 years in some instances) then the dollars should be made available to increase our license capacity and funded places.
- The more Aboriginal children and families we can include in our centre the better chance our communities have of breaking the many vicious cycles our children face.

Centre

- With the new structure of Child Care Benefit paid by the Office of Family Services, MACS services have been made to look like a 'second class service' as MACS services do not register on the office's computers. Child Care staff, parents and the service were not fully aware of the changes and still don't feel like we understand where the MACS fit in.
- We were continually assured that the new system would not affect MACS services, but we still don't feel comfortable with understanding the process now.
- Lack of support in working out the new Child Care Benefit. We had to work this out ourselves!!! Had some assistance from project officers in the Department.

Centre

- We receive funding under the old MACS funding formula.
- Special services money enables us to utilize community organisations and resources such as:
 1. Increase the culturally relevant and appropriate content of the centre
 2. It is used to run additional services for the community which otherwise wouldn't be financially possible in the past e.g. bus services between schools and day care
 3. We currently employ an adult to supervise children on the bus so the driver is not required to supervise children
 4. In the past, Playgroup was operating but due to the fact that no adults stay to supervise the program has been closed and no longer operating
 5. OSHC and Vacation Care programs operate out of Special Services money
 6. Out of our budget we pay for a Cultural Coordinator and Assistant whose job is to include culturally relevant experiences in programs: working with staff and bringing Aboriginal people and Elders into the Centre.

5.2.7 Child Care Fees

Common issues from centres

- In our budgets our costs are increasing and many of our families still struggling to cover their child care fees.
- Our MACS services can't access information from Centrelink that is needed for fee reduction and we are forced to do our own manually. **MACS services feel locked out of the system.**
- The Departments advice prior to the Child Care Benefit changes were woeful and they just didn't know enough information. No wonder, as the rules and guidelines keep changing on them thanks to Canberra.

Centre

In our centre we have a slight issue with parents who earn under \$28,000, as the centre is suppose to claim their share from Centrelink. However, as we are government funded this precludes us from claiming. We discussed this with project staff and were told to still collect a small fee but this doesn't cover CPI.

5.2.8 Networking and Conferences

Common issues from centres

- Our MACS centres depending on where they are do get some opportunities to network within our own state. However, this is not sufficient and would like to see more of this happening in the future.
- We are a unique group of services and we cover such a vast area of Western Australia that a national annual conference to discuss issues, to share resources, training (specifically on Aboriginal/culturally relevant issues), yam about child care is something we all want. **This is a priority for WA MACS.**
- This national MACS meeting would be essential for remote services to attend as well because it would give them the opportunity to do all of the above plus set up their own phone link-ups, swap books and share programming ideas.
- The MACS and the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services should have a closer working relationship with us on a state level as well as a national level. This should be funded separately.
- We have a representative on the SNAICC Executive and we see their organisation as an important form of support to our MACS nationally.
- We would also like them (SNAICC) to support us in organizing a national MACS Conference in the Year 2001.
- Lack of network with MACS services: although there is some through magazines, newsletters, SNAICC.
- Have been fortunate to be invited to local child care service provider meetings monthly to share issues and ideas but often not culturally specific.

5.2.9 Service Delivery

Common issues from centres

- We need an Indigenous Project officer (in the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services or in a Resource & Advisory Agency) who can deal with the MACS specifically. Someone who could answer our questions and queries or even just someone there as a sounding board.
- We would like extra funding provided for the refurbishing of centres every 5 years and to keep up to date equipment and toys for our playgrounds.
- Many of us would like extra money to put into the maintenance line of our budgets so that maintenance on our centres is kept up to date.

Specific centre issues

Centre

- We urgently need funding to purchase a bus for our centre.
- We are very limited in the special events and outings where we can go to or participate in due to the lack of a bus service and also the costs involved.
- We are an Indigenous service yet we don't often have cultural events or Indigenous performers coming into our centre because we have no extra funding to pay for this service.
- On having lost the local community bus for children the number of OSHC children attending has gone from 18 regular down to 9 or 10. Where are the children going – streets?
- Our number of places freed due to children at Kindergarten is less because parents cannot leave work to take them to and from Kindergarten means our numbers virtually are less in child care.

5.2.10 Resource & Advisory Agencies

Common issues from centres

- For this state we have not got a Resource & Advisory Agency that supports our MACS. We used to have the Aboriginal and Islander Women's Congress in Perth but they are no longer in existence.
- We would like to have our own Indigenous Resource & Advisory Service in Western Australia or access to a National Website/Resource library
- Because of the above fact our centre has no extra resources only the essentials.
- We would like a list of any national resources for Indigenous services made available to all MACS centres around Australia.
- We believe that funding needs to be provided to the agencies that are already operating so they could be expanded to meet the needs of all the Indigenous early childhood services in Australia. We believe that at present some other

states don't even have a resource and advisory agency that could give much needed support.

5.2.11 Community Issues

Common issues from centres

- Confidentiality can be an issue when we have such a close-knit group of families and people living in our community.
- Issues such as confidentiality being kept in regards to illnesses can be a problem, particularly, when medical workers or parents may know of a child's illness before the appropriate Centre staff are told.
- Everyone knows everyone's business as shared families tend to and staff has difficulty withdrawing from such conversations.
- In our community we have many social changes happening and one in particular is that many of our younger girls are becoming parents at 16 - 18 years of age and this can put enormous pressure on them and their parents.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- We have a high waiting list and not enough spaces. The supply versus the demand is a real issue for us.
- For some of our families using outside family care such as us is seen as a shame factor. Many feel that they should have family members look after their children and don't really understand that education of a child starts from birth.

A positive issue is:

- Flexibility, at times can be a bonus in relation to Special services funding e.g. Every year we have NAIDOC celebrations and we tend to use Special services funding to employ a coordinator to encourage more participation of Aboriginal people in our centre. This person also learns new skills, is given increased responsibilities and gains confidence and more experience is written on the personal CV's.
- Increased pride in our own culture and this is passed on to the children.

Centre

- Without any reasonable increase in block funding, it's getting more and more difficult to offer respite care as working low income families are the highest priority and we can't afford to leave places vacant for respite unless we continue to run at a bigger deficit. It seems like we are less multifunctional and more mainstream child care.

- Dealing with and helping families deal with substance abuse, unemployment, low income and domestic violence puts added pressure and costs on services especially when they're family or kin. Not easy to calculate these costs.

5.3 Recommendations

1. On a state level we recommend that training for Indigenous staff is looked at and funding is made available to get more of our people into the child care profession.
2. Scholarships should be made available at colleges such as Batchelor, so our staff can afford to complete their studies.
3. That ABSTUDY be looked at on a national level and appropriate changes made to the eligibility status. This is a very important issue in WA.
4. Cultural Awareness training is made available to our Non-Indigenous staff that work in MACS centres. This should be fully funded by the Commonwealth or State. Maybe a national resource agency can be funded to help with this.
5. The QIAS system remain voluntary but all MACS centres when and if they are ready should have support and resources made available to them.
6. Funding to be made available so that centres can visit other services that have gone through the accreditation process and gain valuable knowledge and assistance.
7. Mentoring should be a real option for our many Coordinators around the country who need assistance in becoming a manager or a Coordinator of a service. Too many of our Coordinators/Managers are becoming burnt out or are not given any training in becoming a Manager of a child care centre. This is very evident in the number of Indigenous Coordinators around who have stated that they would have liked more support and on site training when they were new to the job.
8. In regards to administration, we would like a computer and software package that suits our MACS and also training made available as well. For some centres, they would also need an administration person on staff. This major recommendation is very important and needs to be funded.
9. A national representative body drawn up to look at block funding, fee structures, Child Care Benefit, resources, training etc. and to follow up with discussion, make changes and inform the appropriate people.
10. Management training and resources should be funded nationally to support those Indigenous communities, management committees, sponsor groups, Indigenous co-operatives etc. who may need training and resources to assist them in running a child care centre such as a MACS.
11. Child care fees and utilization needs to be looked into further on a national level.
12. We would support a national MACS meeting or conference and suggest that it be held in a different state every year. This should be fully funded by the Commonwealth.

13. On a national level we need to look into the area of administration and the skills and technology needed to do this job correctly. This could be an area looked at in a national MACS meeting. How are we expected to be fully accountable when we don't have the necessary computers and a suitable software package that suits MACS.
14. The area of finding suitable replacement staff is a real big issue and maybe a meeting with our licensing people could help iron out some of our concerns. This issue seems to be getting worse not better.
15. Coordinators in our centres should be given more authority by the licensing section to make decisions on a day-to-day basis when staff replacements are hard or impossible to find.
16. Management training, particularly in the area of financial management is a must for our committees. Our volunteer management committees have a huge responsibility in regard to our centres and many of them don't have experience or training.

5.4 Playgroups

The Aboriginal Playgroups operating in WA may vary slightly from community to community, but basically operate with a main carer plus assistant/s who care for a group of children (not set numbers) and provide structured activities to help with the transition to the more formal situation in kindy/pre-school/school.

Parents are encouraged to also attend playgroup but often do not attend for various reasons, including work related – i.e. working in a CDEP situation. In reality, many playgroups provide unlicensed child care.

Those services coded "enrichment" on our system vary. For example, Gnowangerup, Jigalong, Nyoongah Nutrition and Upurl Upurlila Nguratja are simply breakfast/lunch type services whereas Kora is also unlicensed "child care" with structured activities plus lunch provision.

The mobile services basically operate as per the guidelines for mobile children's services, by providing support, resources, and training to various communities usually on a regular schedule. They usually conduct or assist in conducting playgroups and provide toy libraries.

The only variation to the above is the Gnowangerup Mobile that actually operates "child care" in licensed premises in various locations.

Axon is also a bit different as this mobile targets Aboriginal school aged children in the metropolitan area and rural areas of the central region of WA. The service provides resources, support and advice with regard to Aboriginal culture and education by visiting schools and other communities. The service also provides motivational talks and hands-on activities such as bush camping, tool making and rock painting.

5.5 Other Support Agencies

The MACS in Western Australia can access the mainstream support agencies in Perth. They can obtain information and resources on the QIAS from the Lady Gowrie Training Centre in Perth.

Other support is available from:

The Children's Services Support Unit WA (Inc)
1186 Hay Street,
West Perth WA 6005
Phone: (09) 321 3833 Fax: (09) 321 3919

Training is also available from Meerilinga Training College

Overview:

Since 1922 Meerilinga has strived to further its mission to improve the quality of life for children in Western Australia, evolving and strengthening to meet the ever changing needs of our community. Serving as a peak organisation for others involved in the child care sector, Meerilinga offers hands-on services through its Parents Links with home visiting service for parents for the Fremantle and Midland regions, Family Centres in Beechboro and Woodvale and child care through Winterfold Early Learning Centre. Our Parent and Children's Services division offers support for parents with issues such as child development, early education, behaviour, disabilities and special needs. Meerilinga Training College is a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation, specialising in designing and delivering courses relevant to the current needs of clients in the child care field. Meerilinga Bookshop and the Meerilinga Toy and Educational Resource Library offers resources for parents, teachers, child carers, students and other members of the community and organisations.

Meerilinga Training College

Address:
2nd Floor
The Victoria
14-16 Victoria Avenue (Corner Hay St)
Perth WA 6000

Telephone:
(08) 9218 8022

Facsimile:
(08) 9218 8033

Email:
mte@meerilinga.org.au

6 Northern Territory

Northern Territory Indigenous Services



■ MACS Centres
● Special Services

☆ Mobile Services

6.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

The Northern Territory has an Indigenous population of approximately 51,876 people (according to the ABS statistics).

There are four MACS services in the Northern Territory:

Batchelor MACS – Yera CCC

C/- Batchelor College
Awilla Road
Batchelor NT 0845

Ph: 08 8939-7140
Fax: 08 8939-7100

MACS places - 25
Licensed for 50 places

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Inc

Congress Child Care Centre
Postal:
PO Box 1804
Alice Springs NT 0871

Location:
25 Gap Road
Alice Springs

Ph: 08 8951-4444
Fax: 08 8952-3397

MACS places - 35
Innovative FDC places - 15
Licensed for 55 places

Minbani Family Centre

Postal:
PO Box 40588
Casuarina NT 0811

Location:
175 Leanyer Drive
Leanyer

Ph: 08 8945-2378
Fax: 08 8945-2253

MACS places - 15
S12A places - 10
NGS CBLDC places - 10
Licensed for 35 places

Na-Wulg Wulg Family Care Service

PO Box 1342
Katherine NT 0851

Ph: 08 8971-0944
Fax: 08 8971 0947

MACS places - 30
S12A places - 5
Licensed for 35 places

6.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. Therefore, under each section there may be a difference of opinion on some issues.

6.2.1 Training and Staffing

Common issues from centres

- Qualified Indigenous staff are scarce in the Northern Territory. In fact qualified staff across the board are very hard to find.
- Our Resource & Advisory service (RAP) is no longer operating in Darwin and therefore training support has been very limited. However, this role has now been taken over by the Australian Early Childhood Association in Darwin.
- We now know that training is available with AECA for MACS and they have taken over the role of Resource & Advisory agency just until the end of the year 2000. (Please see section on Other Support Agencies in the Northern Territory.)
- The Northern Territory University (NTU) works in conjunction with our service encouraging our Indigenous worker to enroll in the child care certificate 3 course, however, we have trouble recruiting people who are interested.
- Our Directors definitely need extra training and support. They have to face so many changes in our centres and could do with a lot of extra support and training to help them through the changes.
- Many of our young volunteers who work in our centres need a lot more encouragement and support. We need to get more of our people interested in child care.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- Our centre is really lacking in training, particularly in-service training for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. (This centre is not in the rural area either.)
- We need educators to teach our children their Indigenous culture such as dreamtime story telling and arts and craft activities. This is an important part of being a MACS centre and therefore we need Indigenous people to come in and teach our children their cultural ways.
- The CDEP program for Indigenous people has just become available in August 2000, and that will allow us to use two extra staff in our centre. This will be a big help (although not counted as qualified staff).

Centre

- Our centre has nearly 100% Aboriginal staff and is a very big plus for our families using our service. However, attending in-service training during work hours is an issue for us due to difficulties in getting relief staff.
- We believe the wages for child care workers need to be seriously looked at and increased considering the responsibilities and skills needed for the job. We believe this job takes very dedicated, tolerant patient and understanding people to work with our families.
- Finding qualified staff to work at our centre is difficult at times, particularly on a casual basis as Batchelor is located an hours drive out of Darwin which means people have to drive each day.
- A commuter bus is available for the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) staff. For permanent staff residing in Darwin they must commute in and out each day or alternatively move house. Our child care staff that commute on the BIITE bus are not able to work a full shift as they are dependent on the commuter bus hours. (This is obviously less hours than our staff need.)
- Having the child care centre on the grounds of the BIITE Campus allows Indigenous early childhood students to have a real opportunity to observe, and critique what happens in child care and in particular an Aboriginal child care service. Our centre has a very good working relationship with the early childhood faculty of BIITE.
- Early childhood students who live in Batchelor often do relief work at our centre. This can be of benefit to us because these staff already have some understanding of the nature and operations of our centre and they may also become permanent, fulltime employees down the track.

Rural and remote centres issues

- Our centre offers two traineeships to Aboriginal staff to further their 'child care' skills and studies.
- For the past two years we have had staff studying through Northern Territory University (externally through Darwin), and we had issues with the University not giving confirmation on courses and the staff were assessed on learnt skills (competence based learning) and the issue through the University was the time frame this process took.
- For future training we will access the TAFE College (Centralian College). The courses are the same with the college able to offer Certificate I, Certificate II and Certificate III in child care. They are able to assess skills gained over a longer period of time and the college can support staff hands on by regular visits and ongoing communication.
- Staff are encouraged to get involved in the 'in-house' training. We believe it promotes multi-skilling through in-services and workshops. The centre is unable to take full access of the training offered during the day, as staff need to be on the floor with the children to maintain the ratio for children/staff.
- Out of hours training is offered to support staff in learning about child related issues and updating child care information. Congress encourage staff to attend

by paying overtime and offering time in lieu but to date this is not working as staff don't attend out of hours training.

- We also have an issue of staff not attending out of hours staff meetings although the Director tries very hard to make the meetings more interesting and accessible but to date we generally only get about 50% of staff showing up.
- When employing staff, at the interview process we discuss out of hours training and meetings and the need to attend at least 80% of them but because these details aren't written in the contract of employment many staff don't keep to the verbal agreement.
- We have discussed the above details with the training officer and a draft plan of a training agreement is being presented to our Cabinet and in the future we hope it becomes part of our employment contract.
- The biggest issue we have is the high absentee level among staff, both permanent and casual staff. This situation is made more difficult because we are a remote service and have no relief list.
- We have an issue of keeping Indigenous staff on our relief list due to the unreliability of many of them due to family situations. However, we will continue to encourage Indigenous workers to seek employment with us.
- For our MACS centre it is very, very hard to get staff both Indigenous, non-Indigenous, permanent and relief workers. We have at present tried to pool our relief list from all of our other centres and we are hoping this will help workers become familiar with the many different styles of centres and maybe more regular hours may keep them longer in our remote town.
- Another staff member who finds it hard to access training is our cook and she is obviously very important to our children's health needs and is expected to have the appropriate level of training.
- We have tried many, many ways of finding appropriate staff, including paying high costs for advertising and staff time to approach many different agencies around employment and when we are successful they don't tend to stay very long and we are back to square one.

6.2.2 Administration

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- We would like our staff to access all types of training to cover the administration position.
- Computer training and technology is a must for us.
- Support for new Coordinators is a must particularly in the area of administration and fee collection.

Centre

- There is a need to have computer software programs that incorporate the Multifunctional aspects of MACS. For example MACS may run long day care, outside school hours care, vacation care and playgroups with the same families and children attending. An issue with one software program was that it did not allow for individual children to be registered with the long day care program and the after school care on the same day, which was a pupil free day at school.
- Priority of access information that is an accountability requirement for MACS funding. For example MACS are required to give statistics on the numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children using our services. We are also required to give figures on the amount of hours that non-Aboriginal children use the service in a quarter.

Computer Software Programs are a necessity for the children's records and bookings that make keeping records and doing statistics for funding accountability much more efficient. Obtaining a computer software program has been a positive step for our YERA MACS centre.

Rural centres issues

- Our accounts and fees are being done by our sponsor organisation and at times this is a real issue for child care staff because the workload of people employed in our sponsor organisation is enormous and child care administration is generally the last one's to get completed or when their time commitments allow them to be done.
- This means that at times our families receive their accounts every month or two months and when payments are delayed even further then this can cause parents extreme stress and the fees just increase. In the end many families find it hard to pay.
- We have suggested to families who find it hard to pay that they could pay small amounts each week and then the debt will be manageable, and they agree but in the absence of an account it is hard to keep people to this commitment.
- As the Director this may mean chasing families out the door enquiring about payment of fees and the only response I get is 'where is my account', which we don't always have access to.

- We have priced and sampled 'child care packages' and computers, as this is the way the centre can manage their accounts and family enquiries but we don't have enough funds to purchase the equipment through our budget and we have arranged to look at other options. To do anything else we needed to wait for approval from 'everyone' and this takes too much time. So we have revisited our child care budget and decided the issue of fees and meeting the needs of our families is just so important that we are now going ahead and purchasing the appropriate technology. **This issue is important for our MACS centre and we believe every centre should have one.**

6.2.3 Accreditation

Common issues from centres

- QIAS should remain voluntary for MACS nationally but all services should give some thought to implementing a MACS resource book for Coordinators, staff and management to use as a tool towards understanding the values of the system for our children.
- We believe our staff in our centre would benefit from the process and provide a more balanced program for our children.
- We need to show that our Indigenous staff can provide programs to meet the cultural needs of our children.
- However, the wording in the documentation for QIAS should be worded in such a way that it makes it easier for our Indigenous parents to understand.

Specific centres' issues

Minbani's (located in Darwin) positive issues are:

- There is an advantage in becoming an accredited centre and knowing what the QIAS system is all about.
- The difficult part, is the lengthy process of understanding the four divided parts:
 1. The interactions
 2. Programming
 3. Nutrition
 4. Centre's policies and staff development
- By encouraging everyone to get involved, has made our management committee, parents and staff more aware of why we need Accreditation.
- We have been through accreditation twice and have been accredited for one year each time. We are at present preparing for the third time.
- It was not just hard work but improved our staff's way of thinking and answered the question of "Why are we doing this?"

- The parents became more aware of what their child was doing during the day, more aware of the need for policies and how their child was progressing in their development.
- It made sense to our parents to see issues such as health and safety be reviewed, why their child's learning skills increased, and why the centre put their nutritious meals roster on the daily notice board.
- We feel that without us experiencing the QIAS we would not have become a better centre for our children, families and community.

However

- We did have some staffing problems but learnt through the accreditation process how to handle best practices issues without any real answers.
- We believe the QIAS taught us to focus on maintaining the best practice in the workplace for our children's future.
- We would also like to state that we need more Indigenous Reviewers and that these reviewers should then share with the non Indigenous Reviewers their understanding of how a MACS operates in an Indigenous perspective.

Yera's MACS issues

Quality and quality outcomes must address the particular and unique needs and aims of our service and families. As a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service, we have the opportunity to develop and follow a process that can meet these particular needs and issues, using the QI&A Handbook as a guide and reference.

At YERA we are looking at:

1. What the quality issues are for us, using the QI&A Handbook as a guide and reference;
2. A process that is meaningful and allows equal opportunities for the families and staff to participate;
3. The methods of communication we use to:
 - promote the importance and necessity of quality outcomes
 - give information and encourage active participation and input.

English is not a first language for many of our families, which is an issue for sharing information and interacting and communicating. We have approximately twenty different languages or dialects that are spoken by our families using our centre. Like many services, staffing turnover is a concern when trying to follow through and complete each step of the quality and accreditation process.

It is most important that the National Childcare Accreditation Council have:

1. Indigenous representation on the Council
2. Indigenous people as Reviewers

Positive issues from Ampe Kenhe Apmere (Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Child Care Centre)

Ampe Kenhe Apmere (child's place) is a long day care MACS providing care and support for over 40 families, with the centre licensed for 55 children. Our sponsor is the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Through the organisation discussions in relation to the operational plans and the policies and procedures are done via the Congress cabinet.

The Director and staff maintain the day to day operating of the centre and make recommendations to the board in regard to policy changes and keep cabinet up to date on reviewed policies.

The child care centre employs 12 staff with the emphasis on Indigenous employment and training opportunities.

Last year our service was successful in gaining 3 years Accreditation (highly accredited service). We believe we are the first MACS centre to do so in Australia. To celebrate the event the Minister of Family and Community Services the Hon. Larry Anthony travelled to Alice Springs to present the 'award' on behalf of the QIAS. **This event was in the local papers and in the Accreditation Council's Update (December 1999 issue)**

- We believe this process gave our staff invaluable insight into quality care and reinforced to the staff the high quality of care they are offering our children and their families.

6.2.4 Licensing and Regulations

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- We get on okay with our licensing department, however we would like to see them have some cultural awareness training and become more aware of the issues faced by our MACS centres in the Northern Territory.
- We would also like to meet with them as a group of Indigenous services to share information and concerns we have around their regulations.
- Need to give temporary extended exemptions for rural/remote centres that cannot find replacement staff.
- One centre flies in qualified staff from interstate because of lack of qualified staff.

6.2.5 Management Committees

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- Training and understanding the roles & responsibilities of a Management Committee/Sponsor organisation. Information should cover financial management, changing constitutions, running an AGM, legal responsibilities.
- Very hard to get another management committee up and running in our centre due to the lack of interest and response from our parents.
- We will continue to try and get more interest and we have found that parents often volunteer to do some fund raising and that is a positive start.

6.2.6 Funding for our MACS

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- The Commonwealth Department has a freeze on all MACS places in the Northern Territory over the past nine years.
- This means we cannot increase our placement under the MACS Funding Program.
- How can we possibly grow when demand in the community is high and supply is low.
- We need all of the above issues addressed by the funding Department.

6.2.7 Child Care Fees

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- In our budgets our costs are increasing and many of our families are still struggling to cover their child care fees.
- Our MACS services can't access information from Centrelink and we are forced to work out our fee reductions manually.

Centre

- With the new CCB Centrelink office no longer assessing families for the childcare benefit percentage it is up to the service to access this information our selves from the families. This is sometimes very difficult and some of our parents have to provide us with documentation and this may not happen.
- When the CCB changes happened in June/July 2000 our service was unsure where the MACS fitted in and sought clarification from the Commonwealth Department in our local office. This was followed up with a teleconference

and a follow up visit to our service. However, speaking to Directors of other MACS we are still very unclear as to what we are expected to do.

- We are also isolated from other MACS services and unable to really support one another through the CCB.
- Very hard for us to gain any information from the Commonwealth staff as we have to ring the Darwin Office and often there is only an answering machine to talk to.
- Other Directors in our area have been of some assistance and although they are not MACS we try to support each other.
- It is a big issue for us and we would like this looked at by the Commonwealth Department in Darwin.

6.2.8 Networking and Conferences

Common issues from centres

Specific centres' issues

- Our MACS centres need to work with other Coordinators so we share problems and achievements.
- Need to have ongoing networking system in place, Maybe a website or monthly newsletter to all MACS in Northern Territory.
- This national MACS meeting would be essential for remote services to attend as well because it would give them the opportunity to do all of the above plus set up their own phone link-ups, swap books and share programming ideas.
- We don't have a representative on the SNAICC Executive as yet but we hope to.
- We would also like them (SNAICC) to support us in organizing a national MACS Conference in the Year 2001.
- It is important to have more networking between MACS statewide and nationally, particularly when new funding arrangements come into play, due to the unique way we are funded.
- MACS really need to know from the Commonwealth funding body what our future is.

6.2.9 Service Delivery

Common issues from centres

Specific centre's issues

- We have a waiting list at our centre and we run a long daycare centre plus an OSHC and Holiday program.
- We have a great demand for full, part-time and emergency care for toddlers and the under and over three's. This centre is utilizing 95% to 100% actual care per day.

- We would like to see the number of places given to MACS increased if you really need them.

Centre

- The majority of care provided by our centre is to the student's children who come from the remote and outlying areas, while the parent/guardian is studying. The child whose parents are studying may need care for two weeks then go home for two weeks, then come back for a week then we may not see them again until six months later.
- This is very difficult to staff a service when numbers are unpredictable and the numbers may change from week to week. Staff must be very understanding, and be able to cope with large numbers of children for whom child care can be a strange and daunting place to be.
- Health issues are sometimes a major concern for us due to the numbers of transient children that use our service.
- As English is not a first language for many of our children and their families, this can be an issue for children/staff, and family/staff interactions and communication. We need to look at how we address this issue across the operations of the centre.

Centres positive issues

- Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) which sponsors our centre has been very supportive and at times assisted financially to the running costs of the service.
- We run a long day care centre, a family day care scheme and at different times run an OSHC and holiday program.
- We are currently having our outdoor play area redesigned by a playground 'expert'. We want our play areas to relate to the land and the sea – desert, saltwater and freshwater country. We are including native vegetation that has a purpose such as food, medicines, dyes, and tools that our children and families can relate to. We will include plants with different smells, and with flowers to encourage native birds. We want the areas to be very hands on, to be sensory, interesting and challenging. **This is all very positive and exciting.**

6.2.10 Resource & Advisory Agencies

- For this state we have two organisations that support the MACS in relation to resource and advice.
- For the centre near Darwin we have the the Australian Early Childhood Association and for the centre in Alice Springs they have The Children's Services Support Unit (Central Australia), formerly known as RAP (Resource and Advisory Program). **Please see other support services section.**

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- With the closure of the Resource and Advisory Program in Darwin the Top End of the Northern Territory now does not have Indigenous staff to provide support to them.
- Indigenous staff of Indigenous early childhood services need resource people they can relate to, who have some understanding, and life experiences of working and living with Indigenous people.
- We feel we need people who value, respect and incorporate our particular learning styles into their 'teaching' practices. We need people who are patient, tolerant and who will work with us in a practical and holistic way.
- Resource information, materials and training must acknowledge and incorporate the varying lifestyles and diversity of Indigenous groups. This is not happening enough out there.
- More money must be allocated to Indigenous groups first, then to others who could develop resources appropriate to our Indigenous early childhood services who will then work with them and from them.

6.2.11 Community Issues

Common issues from centres

Specific centre's issues

- We have a high waiting list and not enough spaces. The supply versus the demand is a real issue for us.
- We are trying very hard to encourage more Indigenous people to seek employment with us and also to undertake some form of training.

6.3 Recommendations

1. We need assistance in our state to calculate our fees particularly with the new Child Care Benefit.
2. Need training for Directors of MACS.
3. Capital grants should be made easier to access and receive, as we need to upgrade our equipment.
4. In the Northern Territory most of the MACS have accessed training and support for the national QIAS system and we would like to see it remain voluntary. However, all the MACS centres in the Northern Territory should produce a resource book on the QIAS system and it should be available to everyone.
5. We would like our number of places to be increased if and when we need to. How can we grow and expand if the demand is high but the supply is low.
6. We would like support a national MACS meeting every year.
7. We want our MACS to meet within our own state on a regular basis.
8. Finding qualified staff is a major issue and the training needs need to be looked at on a national level.

6.4 Other Support Services

In the Northern Territory the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services fund the **AECA** (Australian Early Childhood Association NT) to provide support to the MACS centres. This role is then done by the **CISS** (Children's Inclusion Support Services).

They provide support, resources and training to the Children's Services fielding the northern region of the NT, for children:

- From an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background,
- Who have a diagnosed disability or are in the process of being diagnosed,
- From a culturally or linguistically diverse background,
- Who have experienced torture or trauma either through or during their refugee experience, or are
- From an Australian South Sea Islander background.

CISS works to eliminate the barriers that inhibit access and participation of children with additional needs in Commonwealth funded Children's Services. We also help to facilitate developmentally and culturally appropriate programs in these services for children, families and staff.

ALICE SPRINGS

In the Northern Territory there is another support service in Alice Springs. It is the **ACCESS & EQUITY UNIT** of the Children's Inclusion Support Program (Central Australia) Inc.

Children's Services Support Program (CSSP) formerly known as RAP provides Support, Educational Training, Counselling and Advice for all Children's Services, including Management Committees.

The Access and Equity Unit is sponsored by CSSP and provides Support, Training, Resources and Specialised Equipment to families with children who have additional needs.

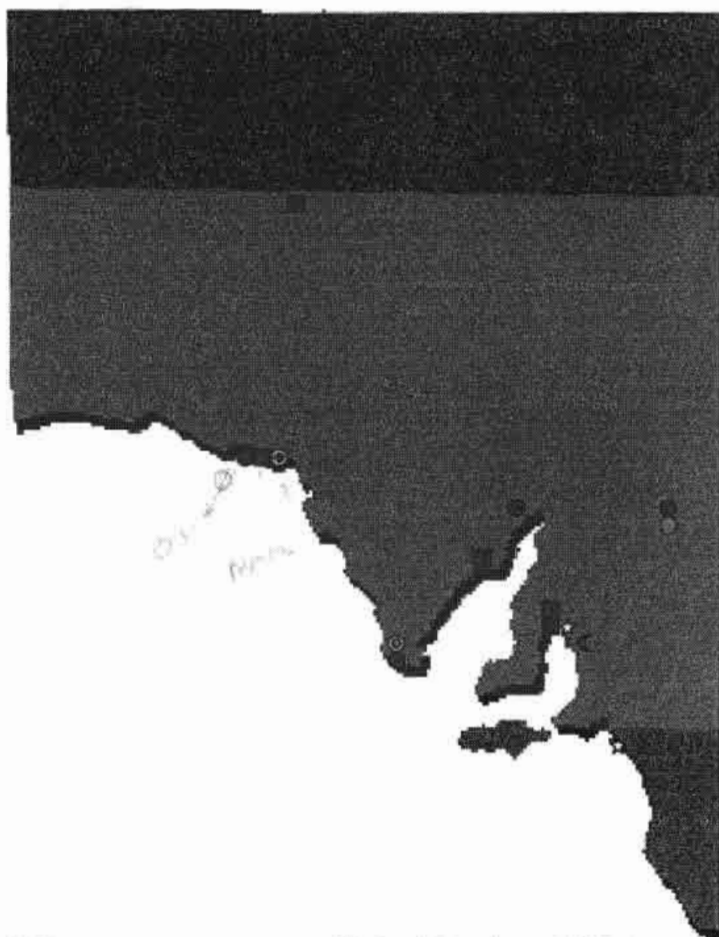
The Community Counsellor is sponsored by CSSP and offers Advice, Counselling and Training for staff, families and children ages 0-12 years.

For any information on the above please contact:

Children's Services Support Unit (Central Australia) Inc
1st Floor Eurilpa House
25 Todd Mall
Alice Springs
Northern Territory 0871
Phone: (08) 8953 4059 or (08) 8953 0785

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South Australian Indigenous Services



- MACS Centres
- ☆ Special Services – LDC
- ☾ Innovative Services

- Special Services – OSHC
- ⊙ Integrated Services
- ⦿ Special Services - Suspended

7.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

South Australia has an Indigenous population of approximately 22,051 people (according to the ABS statistics).

There are five MACS services in South Australia

Koonibba Child Care Centre

C/- Koonibba Council
Ceduna Post Office
Ceduna, SA 5690

Ph: 08 8625-0093
Fax: 08 8625-0062

MACS places for 15
Licensed for 18

Kura Yerlo MACS

208 Lady Gowrie Drive
Largs Bay SA 5016

Ph: 08 8449-7367
Fax: 08 8341-7006

MACS places for 30
Licensed for 30

Kaurna Plains Child Care Centre

Ridley Road
Elizabeth SA 5112
Ph: 08 8255-3299
Fax: 08 8287-6682

MACS places for 40
Licensed for 40

Wynbring Jida CCC MACS

Postal:
PO Box 2376
Whyalla Westlands SA 5608

Location:
2-4 Booth Street
Whyalla Stuart SA 5608

Umoona Community MACS

Postal:
PO Box 474
Coober Pedy SA 5723

Location:
Robyn's Boulevard
Coober Pedy SA 5723

Ph: 08 8672-5644
Fax: 08 8672-5266

MACS places for 15
Licensed for 20

Ph: 08 8649-3737
Fax: 08 8649-3044

MACS places for 25
Licensed for 25

7.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. Therefore, under each section there may be a difference of opinion on some issues.

7.2.1 Training and Staffing

Common issues from centres

- Not enough qualified Indigenous workers throughout our state. The MACS services in the rural area are also finding it very difficult to get qualified Non-Indigenous workers.
- Being a remote MACS service travel makes it almost impossible to call on relief staff particularly when permanent staff call in sick.
- Because of the isolation of some of our MACS it makes it doubly hard to attract staff in general let alone qualified staff.
- Several of our South Australian MACS are fortunate enough to have a TAFE College nearby in the community but still need extra support and resources to continue with their training. They also prefer to do their training with other Indigenous people. Most of our TAFE's in SA are becoming more flexible in meeting the needs of Indigenous students by giving more on-site training.
- However, for the others travel and cost of training is still a big issue. Many of our remote and rural centres are really limited to the availability of enough trained staff in their communities.
- Coordinators here in SA have access to mentoring support from ARMSU (Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit) and this is proving to be one of the main forms of training for our Coordinators of our Indigenous services.
- The only issue is that more financial assistance is needed to go to this resource agency to expand on the mentoring support. This form of mentoring training is what Indigenous people really need.
- Most of our MACS use CDEP participants in their centres and this seems to be a great support. However, issues can arise around who they are responsible to and why. Other areas of concern range from reliability, punctuality and in some instances confidentiality. This is unclear in some communities and may be an issue for other services. We often find that there is no follow through (by CDEP) to see how CDEP participants are coping especially with the young ones.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- We now have 2 CDEP participants working at the centre. Both girls get extra paid work out of our budget and therefore work 4 full days a week. This gives them encouragement and they feel valued by the service. Self-esteem is lifted and new skills are learnt. We feel that this is the area that our young Indigenous people need a real lift in and hopefully will assist them in their future directions.
- The issues with CDEP often place extra burden on the shoulders of the Coordinator. CDEP Managers should take on the role of follow through and mentoring, as it is not always convenient for Coordinators to discuss issues such as these on the phone. Another example of time consuming issues is that one of our Coordinators is placed in the position of having to leave her service and walk over to the office for meetings at inconvenient times.
- ARMSU/Network SA (as mentioned in the section of other support services in SA) is a great support in the area of training for our services. Here, in SA our Indigenous services manage to meet on a state level 3-4 times a year and at each meeting we decide what sort of assistance we need. Over the years we have had assistance in:
 1. Policy writing (which should include cultural understanding) and resources to take back to our centres
 2. Submission writing workshops
 3. Accreditation training and support
 4. Cultural Awareness training and resources
 5. Staff Appraisal workshop
 6. Long Service Leave workshop
 7. GST Training
 8. Resource updates
 9. Programming workshops etc
 10. Behavior Management training
 11. Fraud workshops and information resources
 12. Financial Management assistance
 13. Legal & Industrial advice
- Although we receive the above support we would really like all of our staff to attend these meetings and obviously this would send the costs up enormously. Therefore our Resource Agency here in SA should receive extra funding to continue their good work in supporting our Indigenous services here in SA.
- We also acknowledge that many of our staff can't get away for blocks of time to attend training and therefore, on site training is one of our preferred choices.
- As mentioned before, traineeships seem to be a success for some of our centres, however they are generally only for 12 months and then they are left to their own devices to try and finish their training in child care. This issue needs to be looked at on a national level.
- Traineeships are one way of helping get our people trained although the issue of completing the full diploma is still a big issue for some. After 12 months the person is still not qualified (although they do receive a certificate 3).

Remote area issues:

- Some registered training providers who give traineeships are inconsistent with support for trainees and have little or no contact with them during the period.
- Some TAFE lecturers are often hard to contact and this leaves the phone as the only form of communication sometimes. This costs heaps to the trainees and most times to the service involved. Would like this issue looked at on a national level.

7.2.2 Administration

Many of our services here in South Australia have on staff Administration people skilled in the area of child care or at least pay for local accountants to look after this area. However, not all have access to the above and to those that do even they need to understand how this system works because Indigenous people need to understand these skills.

Common issues from centres

- We do have a computer and a computer software program that is suitable and our staff have been trained. This is not an issue for us but for other centres it would be an enormous task without all of the above.
- Another centre was successful in receiving a grant from Community Benefit SA to not only upgrade their computer but also purchase one for the children to use in the centre. The grant also enabled them to purchase software programs suitable for all ages of children.
- We use MYOB and some other services use SPIKE here in SA and although this system is working okay it once again seems like there is no real consistency for MACS. Makes it hard to give and receive support between centres (particularly admin support).
- However, we feel that if we were to lose some of our long term administration staff that our centres have it would be very difficult to replace them with trained staff who have a good knowledge of child care. It is for this reason that we would like our Coordinators to have some good basic knowledge of the finances and the day-to-day budgets of our MACS.
- We also have had some issues with small fraud happening as well as money mismanaged within centres and this has led to the realization that training and understanding of financial matters is very, very important.

Specific centres' issues

- Training in computer technology is an issue for us.
- In the rural areas we tend to rely on outside expertise to do our administration and therefore we need to know the types of things we must expect of them, the costs for their services, and also to set meetings with them around regular updates and checks on budgets. Payment of wages is one of the main

outsourcing happening in this State and whether the pays are outsourced or not, everyone has to understand why payments must not be made in advance, the giving and receiving of rostered days off, the entitlements around how many sick days are paid etc.

- If we are sponsored by an independent Aboriginal Community Organisation / Council then our administration is taken over by them. If the system is good then problems may not arise other than our staff don't necessarily get a good understanding and training of their own budgets etc. We become too dependent on them for financial assistance. On the other hand, if administration is lacking then this too can become a big problem. Sometimes, it takes longer for correspondence to happen and confirmation and agreement to take place.

7.2.3 Accreditation

In our state we have a mixture of issues with the National Accreditation Process. However, most of the MACS are supportive in gaining resources and training when they can. The majority would like to keep the system voluntary for the present provided they all keep working towards participating in the process eventually.

Our state also has the first MACS service to go through the Accreditation process and they have just been accredited again for a period of 12 months. This centre is the Kaurna Plains Early Childhood Centre in the suburb of Elizabeth in Adelaide. They would like to put their experience of going through the national accreditation process in this report as a positive move for them. Their experience is listed here:

There is a need for support on a National level for all MACS Services and Aboriginal services who are choosing to go through the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System process. A lot of services have fears around Accreditation:

1. *Lack of knowledge*
2. *What is expected from them through this process?*
3. *Where do we begin?*
4. *Is it culturally appropriate?*
5. *Training & development*
6. *Will there be an Indigenous Reviewer?*

We also appreciate that other services nationally have their own issues on this process and would like it to remain voluntary.

To start with our centre wrote down the following processes:

Initial reaction to Accreditation

- *Staff did not understand the process*
- *Did not like it initially*
- *Called it another thing to do and saw it as a new thing - CALLED CHANGE*

What did the accreditation process achieve for you?

- *Made staff aware*
- *Improved what we do at the centre*
- *Looked at the quality of care*
- *Became aware of standard requirements*
- *Going through the process staff became more aware of our commitments in our work place*
- *This is a requirement we felt we wanted. Individually we all became more aware*

What did this process achieve for you personally?

- *Made me look at myself (what I was doing and not doing)*
- *Working towards improving best practice for the centre*
- *Gave me lots of knowledge*
- *Build up of pride – “ we are accredited ”*
- *Accountability to parents/community – children, to each other and staff*
- *I became more accountable to the children*
- *The same quality of care was the same across the board (child care industry)*
- *Personal pride that we can achieve this together*
- *Job satisfaction*

Self study process

- *Extremely confusing in pilot questions - wording was confusing*
- *When we first did this we were “basic”*
- *During the 7 months waiting to be reviewed our quality of care exceeded good quality*
- *It was only on how we rated ourselves that we were only accredited 1 year (we learned something again about this process)*

Recruiting Aboriginal reviewers for this process

- *We would like to see more Indigenous reviewers*
- *More training and development/workshops around the Accreditation process*
- *The council should revisit the guidelines for acceptance of Indigenous people to become reviewers*
- *A recruiting drive to be by the Council to encourage more participation by Indigenous people*
- *Cultural awareness be a pre-requisite for other reviewers and moderators*
- *More consultations with Indigenous services*

Kaurna Plain's overall thoughts on the QIAS system

- *We need to work together as a MACS/Aboriginal Services and overcome these fears together so that we are able to move on.*
- *This process means quality child care and accountability to our children, families and community.*
- *Out of this process will be ongoing training and development for our staff*
- *We see this process as a good measuring tool for all involved in our MACS/Aboriginal Service. It has enhanced the following for us:*
 1. *Interactions between staff and children*
 2. *Interactions between staff and parents*
 3. *Interactions between staff*
 4. *The program (Philosophy and goals)*
 5. *Nutrition, Health and Safety Practices*
 6. *Centre Management and Staff Development*

Would have been great if we could have had the funding to visit another MACS service that had been through the process and they could have been a great support to us. Indigenous people learn better by seeing and communicating.

Specific centres' issues are:

- *We have not even begun the process of Accreditation and feel that we would need a lot of assistance to firstly understand it and then attempt to have a go.*
- *We would have to overcome difficulties such as high turnover in staff, understanding and support from our management group, travel consideration to gain training and resources and the need for ongoing financial and human resources to meet the challenge of QIAS.*
- *Would really like the financial support so that we can travel to Adelaide and visit Kaurna Plains and see how they went through this process.*

- We are starting to receive support and training from the Gowrie on QIAS (they are very supportive of Indigenous services in this state).
- Other services not quite fully settled in their staffing numbers and awareness yet to give their full support to this system. However, we are receiving support and training from ARMSU/Network SA as well as the Gowrie.

7.2.4 Networking and Conferences

Our MACS centres do participate in state meetings on a regular basis. This is sponsored by ARMSU and they do a great job of supporting all our Indigenous services here in SA.

About the Aboriginal Services Meetings

The Aboriginal Services Meeting, held 3 times each year, provides an opportunity for Coordinators, Committee or Council Members and Staff to meet with each other in a formal yet relaxed environment. These meetings, over 2 consecutive days, take place in the ARMSU/Network SA training rooms or in venues at various country locations.

ARMSU staff ask service Coordinators and service representatives if they would like to request speakers, information on various topics to help them in their jobs, training, Departmental representatives, etc. Arrangements are made accordingly and an agenda is then prepared to provide a relevant, useful, training and networking meeting.

The November Aboriginal Services Meeting (an example)

November's meeting this year provided training on submission writing, programme planning for children's development and conducting staff appraisals. Large group discussion featured fee collection ideas, community awareness and the SNAICC Report. A new "Management Checklist" resource was introduced and copies provided to each service with an explanation for its use. Information included in the checklist was put together as a result of phone and in-person queries from services staff throughout the year. Social and networking opportunities were built into the 2 day meeting. The meeting commenced on day 1 with thanks and respect to the Kaurna People and Day 2 with a beautiful song from a child care Coordinator.

Evaluation Sheets are always provided at these meetings. Copies of completed evaluation sheets from the November meeting are included in Appendix B.

Common issues from centres

- However, not enough networking is happening on a national level. Because we are a unique group of services an ideal situation should be that we meet on a national level at least once a year or every two years if possible.
- If a meeting is not possible then at the very least maybe a teleconference is possible on a regular basis. Both need to be funded for.
- The MACS in this state and the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services do have a closer working relationship and this is helped by the fact that we do have an Indigenous project officer who works with us. The other stable point to remember is that the project staff does get to attend all the meetings where we have the opportunity to have training and issue sharing time with them as well.
- We have a SA representative on the SNAICC Executive and we see this organisation as an important form of support to our MACS nationally.
- We would also like them (SNAICC) to support us in organising a national MACS Conference in the Year 2001.
- The other issue we would like to see happen is that more funding is given to our services to support more people to attend our meetings held by ARMSU. This could mean that some of our Management committee could attend and that other staff could get an opportunity as well.

7.2.5 Service Delivery

Common issues from centres

- Our Indigenous culture is very important to our children, parents and community and we believe our centre is a great place to teach our unique culture. This can be an expensive exercise if you need to hire outside support and resources. Many of our community elders give invaluable free time and support to our service, but even they may need assistance getting to and from our centre and also costs of purchasing resources.
- Sometimes, due to the high turnover of staff and the replacement costs of filling in for regular staff that may be absent for lots of personal reasons (genuine) we find our budget is sometimes quite high in the staffing area. This is due to the fact that replacing staff costs centres a lot more due to the casual rate of pay under our award.
- Due to the high health needs of our children in the community we need extra funding to meet those needs e.g.: we have lots of children with running noses and eyes that can and does send our costs up when we purchase more tissues than maybe a mainstream centre. For the centres in the remote areas of our state the costs of transporting fresh fruit and vegetables is also very high.
- A funded vehicle is very important in the running of a MACS centre here in SA. We need this service to transport our children to and from the service.

7.2.6 Licensing and Regulations

Common issues from centres

- The Department of Education, Training Employment in this state have a licensing section that meets quite regularly with the Indigenous services (through the Aboriginal Services Meeting organised by ARMSU/Network SA).
- Regulations have changed in many ways including ratios of staff and children and this is proving an issue where many of our services are struggling to get qualified staff.
- Replacement of staff is another major issue, particularly for our rural and remote services. At present, some of our services have been given exemptions because of their difficulties but are not sure if this will continue into the future.
- Other issues relate to the Coordinators of services being nominated as the licensees with extra requirements placed on them.
- Coordinators from Remote Services commented on the difficulty of gaining new skills such as computer skills without access to off the job training.

7.2.7 Management Committees

Common issues from centres

- There is a real need to provide support for Management Committees, Coordinators and staff. The role and responsibilities the Management Committee have and always will be an important job as the employer of the centre staff. Particularly, when we know the makeup of these committees are often parents of children who use the service. Many of our parents lack in skills in Management issues and generally try to do a wonderful job to the best of their ability. The other concern is that once on the committee sometimes for family reasons it is hard to always get enough people at meetings on a regular basis. Issues such as these are very real in South Australia and quite often there is a real high turnover of members on our Indigenous Management Committees.

Another concern is that many of the childhood services are only one of many projects our Indigenous communities are running. This may mean is some areas that child care is sometimes on the bottom of the importance stakes. It may also mean that primarily for men on these committees it is seen as "women's business". The overall perception of child care is something that must change for the better. Traditionally, child care was child minding and this included being fed, watered and put to sleep at the appropriate times. Children were always being looked after and come home with a painting or two.

We are now trying to change that perception with our people and ingrain in them that we are early childhood workers who want to give our children the best start in life by educating them from an early age. We want them to acknowledge that we are a profession that must be based on good quality care covering all areas of childhood development as well as meeting the cultural

needs of our children. Network SA and ARMSU are very supportive in helping these perceptions and changes to happen in our state.

Specific centres' issues

Centre

- We believe that all Management Committee members should come together on a state and national level (when possible) at least 3 times a year with their Coordinators. These meetings would have a component of management training, resources and sharing and networking.
- One centre would also like to have more support from their local council in relation to vandalism on the community and to the child care facilities. Social problems such as vandalism are very real in this community and it does affect the service and its operation as repairs and maintenance are extremely costly in remote areas. More money being spent on repairs ultimately means less money is available to be spent on children's resources.
- Our financial affairs are handled at a monthly council budget meeting and then passed on to the child care staff that is not equipped with suitable computer technology and software to handle their budgets. Perhaps, if we had the training and relevant technology then it would be more suitable for us to do our own finances and administration in the future.
- At present, we do our own child care fees manually and are sometimes held up with financial matters when council members are away or not available for lengths of time. Disruptions and delays cause undue stress to child care staff and in particular to the Coordinator.

Other centres

- There is a lack of understanding between board/management and the Manager/Coordinator of the centre. The Coordinator therefore feels frustrated and not in control of the daily operations most of the time.
- One of the biggest issues is the lack of commitment and support to the monthly meetings of the child care centre. Add to this a limited knowledge and understanding of child care (by today's standards) and lack of skills in the financial running of a business generally could and does mean problems keep happening from time to time.
- Many of the above issues then seem to affect staff morale and teamwork (not to mention stress for the Coordinator). This may result in high turnover in staff numbers.
- Network SA/ARMSU do give training and resources to our committees but quite often there are limited numbers arriving at these sessions (or the same people always show up) and the rest are lacking commitment to their roles and positions.

Several centres' positive issues

- We previously had a committee and Coordinator that was not really supportive of our centre and lacking in financial management. This has been turned around and with the advent of new members who bring with them a variety of experiences and knowledge of child care and financial management. This new committee along with an experienced new Coordinator of the organisation has meant we could continue to operate.
- Our centre was in danger of closing or relocating because of poor financial management and the stress of a review was very hard on all people involved. However, we are happy to state that we can now go on operating our child care and other programs.
- We as a MACS service honestly believe that to be successful you must have a combination of good management, good Coordinators, good financial administration and obviously good staff.

7.2.8 Funding for our MACS

Common issues from centres

- Block funding is still the preferred manner in allocating funds to our centre.
- All centres feel that the amount of funds given to MACS could most certainly be increased to help provide a more holistic approach to the type of services provided. This should also take into consideration the rural and remote issues.
- One Coordinator of MACS personally feels that every MACS service should be block funded for Child Care Benefit and Operational Subsidy for every licensed place at that centre, no matter what the utilisation is.
- We feel that there is a lack of capital funds available for us to upgrade our old buildings, make any renovations or keep up with the cost of vandalism happening in some of our centres.

Positive issues

- We just recently had training in relation to submission writing (provided by ARMSU) and we believe it is a necessary skill to have.
- Our relationship is very good with our funding body here in SA. All project Officers and their executives are very helpful and understanding of our needs. However, they are restricted in the amount of funding available.
- One of our rural MACS was fully funded by the Commonwealth to purchase a new bus to take their children to and from the centre and on excursion. Our centre was in desperate need of one and was delighted that the funding body managed to come up with the funding.

7.2.9 Child Care Fees

Common issues from centres

- A major issue is the collecting of fees for child care. Especially parents who are in receipt of sole parent or other social benefits.
- CDEP parents make up a large proportion of people who use the child care centre and quite often the fees are taken out of their pays before they receive it. This helps a lot towards the collection of fees.
- Many of our centres in SA have had to put into place policies on late fee collections but do their utmost to try and work it out with the parents beforehand. Due to the special needs of our children no child is refused access.
- Many of our services depend on fund raising by staff to meet their community income target, and rent collection from the hiring of buildings and the use of their buses to try and meet their community income targets. Although staff happily support this method of raising the necessary funds, it is extra work and time that staff have to put in.

7.2.10 Resource & Advisory Agencies

The MACS centres and the other 11 Indigenous services in South Australia are supported by Network SA Resource Advisory and Management Services Inc. (Network SA) and ARMSU (Aboriginal Resource and Management Support Unit). (Refer to *Section 7.4* for information about the agencies.)

Specific centre positive issue

- ARMSU and Network SA provide wonderful resources and advice about anything we needed for our Services. Our ARMSU mob has supported the MACS tremendously over the years. I hope and recommend that this support will continue for all of us. I have grown so much in my position as the Coordinator of a MACS because of their wonderful support, training and nurturing. Thank you Network SA and ARMSU.

7.2.11 Commonwealth Staff information

The issues from South Australia are a combination of what the five services have written down themselves and also from staff working with the Department of Family & Community Services, the Licensing Section of the South Australian Department of Education, Training & Employment and from ARMSU which is the Aboriginal Resource & Management Support Unit that has worked with the five MACS over several years. Also, in this state there are several other early child care programs run in South Australia funded by the Commonwealth and in some cases a combination of funding from the Department of Family & Community Services (FaCS), the South Australian Department of Education, Training & Employment (DETE) and the Department of Education, Training & Youth Affairs (DETYA).

Issues range from:

- Majority of the services will be charging the same rate of fees, one service in particular will be using the CCB Ready Reckoner to calculate payment for a couple of their parents who are on high incomes. This is due to the fact that the services are not eligible to claim CCB (the old Child Care Rebate and Childcare Assistance).
- Four out of our five services are managed by Councils, child care issues seem to be put on the back burner and only seem to become priority when there is a crisis or individuals are seeking financial assistance from the service, i.e.; camping and sporting trips etc.
- Large turnover of management committee members.
- Management committee members fully understanding their roles in relation to financial reports. Some services fully rely on their accounting firms hoping that what is presented is correct, without checking.
- Lack of trained/untrained staff both in metropolitan Adelaide and country.
- More promotion of services in High Schools to generate interest when students leave school, career awareness.
- The services previously received a block grant amount of Child Care Assistance calculated on utilised places. Under the new CCB services would have received substantially increased amounts of funding. The decision was taken nationally to restrict the amount of increased funding to 10% until a review of block granted services (not just MACS) took place as in some states it was the opinion that some services didn't need the extra funding. The review (which has been delayed because of key numbers of staff moving elsewhere) will focus on each service and determine whether the additional funding can be utilised in improving the existing service delivery and/or expanding it.
- The review of MACS services should provide important information towards this.

7.3 Recommendations

1. Training – not enough qualified Indigenous workers in our state and it does not look to be improving in the near future. We recommend that the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services and DEETYA get together to fund on a State basis Indigenous employees from our centres who want to undergo the complete Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services). These students should start and complete the Diploma together and support one another through the process.
2. The amount of funding for MACS nationally should be increased to meet the changing needs of the services we know we must provide.
3. We should have a national MACS meeting at least once every two years. This could also include the Commonwealth staff running a national get together for the project staff who work with the Indigenous services. They could run side-by-side but meet at the end to discuss common issues.
4. Our Resource & Advisory Agency ARMSU receive extra funding to continue their good work but also to cover the expenses of more people attending the meetings.
5. Maybe a state-by-state or national meeting could be fully funded for our Management Committee members and Council representative to attend and receive the appropriate training and support.
6. The mentoring program that is provided by ARMSU is looked at on a national level and funding is made available for this to continue. It is the only form of training and support that has a proven success rate for new and present Coordinators of our Indigenous services here in SA.
7. The QIAS system remains voluntary but all MACS centres should attempt some sort of training and resources to help them through the process when they are ready. Plus, support and resources should be made available to us as a special group with special needs. Maybe, even put this on the national agenda if and when we have the first national MACS meeting.
8. We need to make sure we have an Indigenous voice on the National Accreditation Council and that they make an effort to meet with us on a national level.
9. We need more Indigenous people as reviewers, moderators and a voice on the National Accreditation Council.
10. Funding to be made available so that centres can visit other services that have gone through the Accreditation process and gain valuable knowledge and assistance.
11. Training is a major issue for our services and therefore we need to seriously come up with a national funded system to change the number of people accessing training, promote child care as a career path, make the training more culturally

relevant, support the people who are in training with better resources and information.

12. Look at the Traineeships that are available and come up with some extra funding to support those trainees to complete their full diplomas in child care.
13. Mentoring should be a real option for our many Coordinators around the country who need assistance in becoming a manager or a Coordinator of a service. Too many of our Coordinator/Managers are becoming burnt out or are not given any training in becoming a Manager of a child care centre. This is very evident in the number of Indigenous Coordinators around who have stated that they would have liked more support and on site training when they were new to the job.
14. In regards to administration, we would like a computer and software package that suits our MACS and also training made available as well. For some centres, they would also need an administration person on staff. This major recommendation is very important and needs to be funded.
15. SNAICC to be a national voice for all our Indigenous services not just the MACS.
16. Legal and Industrial advice is very important to Indigenous Services in this state and we would like the Commonwealth government to fund this service for us. It is no longer a funded service and we have to pay for this service ourselves.
17. Management training and resources should be funded nationally to support those Indigenous communities, management committees, sponsor groups, Indigenous corporations etc., which may need training and resources to assist them in running a child care centre such as a MACS or any another service to do with early childhood.
18. Training in submission writing is a necessity.
19. Child care fees and utilization needs to be looked into further on a national level.
20. A national representative body is drawn up to look at block funding, fee structures, child care benefits, resources, training etc. This is to be followed up with discussion, any changes looked at and the appropriate people informed.
21. Funding made available to employ an Aboriginal Community Worker in each state to work with parents of children who attend an Indigenous Early Childhood Service. The role of that person would be to teach the parents about the importance of becoming involved in their children's development and to become more aware about the importance of them as parents being the main educators in their homes.
22. Funding made available to run parenting programs at our centre.
23. On a national level there should be some sort of report on the outcomes for our children who do attend our MACS and any other Early Childhood Service.

24. SNAICC and our other Resource agencies nationally support us to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development to our communities and to parents of Indigenous children.
25. Health of our children is an issue and maybe a closer working relationship with Aboriginal Health should be set up on a state and national level.
26. Many social issues need to be addressed on a national level e.g. substance abuse, unemployment, domestic violence, gambling, nutrition, healthy foods and many children's health issues.
27. At our national meetings we should have invited guest speakers who could speak on the issues of children with special needs, children with disabilities and children with learning problems etc.

7.4 Other Support Services in South Australia

ARMSU



ABORIGINAL RESOURCE & MANAGEMENT SUPPORT UNIT

Support for your Service

ARMSU is a support service for Aboriginal children's services funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Anyone involved with these services can call us for advice or resources.

We can assist you with advice about:

- ◊ management committees
- ◊ staffing
- ◊ policy development
- ◊ budgeting
- ◊ planning
- ◊ performance appraisal
- ◊ resources / equipment
- ◊ activities / programming
- ◊ working with government departments

Free Advice and Information

Telephone

Advice is available during office hours on week days (call 8445 8128). Country people can call us free on 1800 673 714.

Visits

We will visit your city and country services at your request, to give support and information. If you would like a visit to your centre to discuss an issue or just to find out more about what we do, call us.

ARMSU News

Three or four times a year, we publish the ARMSU News newsletter which is mailed free to all Aboriginal children's services in SA. The ARMSU News contains news

and information for management members, Coordinators and staff, from management issues to ideas for activities and news from services.

Resources for Aboriginal Children's Services

We have developed a number of resources for Aboriginal children's services. There is a charge for some of the resources.

Examples of our resources are:

- **Director's Kit**

A desk top reference kit for Directors / Coordinators. Handy pro-formas and checklists, plus copies of industrial awards and other legislation which affects children's services (with notes to help you read them) and sample job descriptions for child care workers, Coordinators, clerical staff and cooks in child care centres

- **Policy Guides**

Quick, easy to read notes and summaries to help staff explain reasons for policies.

Aboriginal Services Meetings

About three times each year, we hold 2-day meetings for Operators, Coordinators, Management Committee Members and staff of Aboriginal Child care and Out of School Hours Care Services.

The meetings are busy, because we always have a lot of information to share and speakers to hear, but they are also fun and a good opportunity to catch up with other people in Aboriginal Children's Services.

ARMSU Cultural Awareness Team (ACAT)

This service is designed to support the inclusion of Indigenous children and families in Commonwealth funded children's services in South Australia. ACAT is available to provide support that is culturally appropriate for Indigenous children and families to access the following services:

- Community based long day care
- Private long day care
- Family day care
- Out of school hours care
- Occasional care
- MACS (multifunctional centres)

ACAT can offer

To Indigenous children and their families:

1. Current information on children's services in SA
2. Assistance in accessing children's services
3. Language support and maintenance of home language
4. Assistance in settling the child and parent into the service

5. Advocating and working with communities

To children's services staff:

1. Information about the inclusion of Indigenous children and their families.
2. Assisting the staff team with programming.
3. Modelling culturally appropriate experiences to meet the needs of Indigenous children.
4. Supporting the coordination of effective liaison between parents, staff and other relevant agencies.
5. Cultural awareness training, staff development opportunities including on-site training.
6. Information, assistance and access to the ARMSU Resource Centre.

ARMSU is part of

network sa

Network SA Resource, Advisory & Management Services Inc

Network SA is a resource and advisory service for operators, managers and management committees of child care and Out of School Hours Care services in SA. They provide practical advice and information about management issues via the telephone, newsletter and resource papers, workshops and face to face visits. Network SA sponsors ARMSU and the ACAT.

ARMSU, ACAT and Network SA are located at:
The Parks Community Centre
Trafford Street
Angle Park SA.

Postal address:
PO Box 2440
Regency Park SA 5942

Telephone: 08 8445 8128
Toll free: 1800 673 714 (country callers)
Facsimile: 08 8268 8065
Email: armsu@networksa.org.au

7.5 CDEP Child Care Issues

7.5.1 Employment

Among those for whom information was available at the time of the 1996 Census³, 40.7% of the Indigenous population was employed compared to 56.2% of the total population.

A higher proportion of Indigenous males (48.1%) than Indigenous females (34.0%) was employed. This pattern also existed for the total population but the proportions employed were significantly higher (64.4% for males and 48.4% for females).

The Australian Capital Territory had the highest proportions of employed Indigenous males (56.3%) and females (52.2%) while the Northern Territory recorded the lowest (37.8% for males and 30.1% for females).

The unemployment rate was significantly higher for the Indigenous population (22.7%) than for the total population (9.2%). Indigenous males experienced higher unemployment rates (24.6%) than Indigenous females (20.2%). The unemployment rate for the total male population (9.9%) was similarly higher than that for the total female population (8.3%).

At the time of the 1996 Census, New South Wales recorded the highest unemployment rate for Indigenous males (29.3%) and the Northern Territory the lowest rate (19.1%), New South Wales also recorded the highest unemployment rate for Indigenous females (24.0%) and the Australian Capital Territory the lowest rate (11.2%).

The unemployment rates for total males and females were highest in Tasmania (12.3% and 9.3% respectively), whilst the Northern Territory recorded the lowest for total males (7.8%) and the Australian Capital Territory the lowest for total females (6.4%).

Industry

The non-government sector accounted for 52.9% of employed Indigenous people, while a further 27.6% were employed in the government sector and 14.9% in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). Of the total population 79.6% were employed in the non-government sector, 17.8% in the government sector and 0.2% in CDEP.

Community Development Employment Projects Scheme

In the 1996 Census there were 12,259 Indigenous persons recorded as employed in the CDEP scheme. As noted earlier, this accounted for 14.9%

³ This section is taken from Pages 33 –34 of Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Australia 1996. ABS Catalogue No. 2034.0, Canberra.

of employed Indigenous persons. Employment in CDEP was more likely for Indigenous males (16.4%) than Indigenous females (12.9%).

The Northern Territory had the highest proportion of employed Indigenous people participating in CDEP (42.5%) followed by Western Australia (26.1%), Queensland (16.7%) and South Australia (16.4%).

Of the 12,259 Indigenous CDEP employees, 92.2% recorded not having a qualification, 2.0% reported having a qualification and 5.8% either inadequately described the qualification or did not state it at all.

As mentioned above, (according to the Census in 1996) there were 16.4% of the total numbers of Indigenous people in Australia who were participating in the CDEP scheme in South Australia. This number I have no doubt has increased not only in SA but in the other states as well.

Therefore in this state, along with many other states in Australia there are Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) up and running in cities, towns, and communities. Many of the MACS centres use staff from CDEP to work in their child care centres. They also provide child care for the parents who work for CDEP. However, to my knowledge there are no child care centres fully funded by ATSIC specifically to cater for the needs of CDEP participants.

In this state we have 5 MACS centres and 11 other Commonwealth Indigenous Early childhood services (already mentioned in the above information). Besides those we also have services funded by our State Department of Education, Training and Employment. There are however two child care services that have some form of direct impact or influenced by a CDEP scheme. One is a creche (for the present) and caters mainly for the workers of a CDEP program. The other is basically a long day care service that is managed by the Bungala Aboriginal Corporation in Pt. Augusta (CDEP). This centre is situated in the Pt. Augusta TAFE building (TAFE donate the building) and the Aboriginal CDEP program manages it.

The Pt. Augusta service has been going for a few years and was only taken over by the Bungala Aboriginal Corporation in March 2000. The centre caters mainly for TAFE participants and particularly Indigenous students. There are a few CDEP participants who use the service but basically it caters for most parents in and around Pt. Augusta. Bungala employs 100 people full time in the areas of general building work, landscaping and labour and plant hire and is a Community Development Employment Program. Bungala is recognised as being at the forefront of similar organisations in respect of commercial development. The organisation depends on income from contracts undertaken by its staff to remain operational. All staff are Apprenticed where appropriate and the focus is on giving people qualifications and experience that will sustain their employability in the future rather than 'training' with no long term benefit.

Bungala, approximately 12 months ago, took over the child care service previously run by the Pt Augusta TAFE (still runs from TAFE building). The service provides care for at least 25 children but EFT's at present are less than 12. The service hovers around the break-even line but certainly is not a profitable exercise for the organisation.

Bungala, in operating the child care service over the last 12 months, have experienced difficulty in attracting qualified child care staff, particularly those of Aboriginal descent. In consideration of this and their organisation's philosophy to provide formal training that results in future employment opportunities Bungala are pursuing the opportunity to provide up to seven Aboriginal people with training towards a Diploma in Child Care. However they will need additional funding to do this e.g. at least \$90,000 over three years.

The availability of qualified child care staff particularly those of Aboriginal descent is an ongoing problem. Given this, the organisation's background and the expected ability of an Aboriginal organisation to attract Aboriginal trainees the organisation is seeking the Commonwealth to help investigate the matter further.

The next steps should involve discussion with DETE (State Department of Education, Training & Employment), DETYA (Commonwealth Department of Employment, Training & Youth Affairs), DEWRSB (Comm. Dept of Employment, Workplace Relations & Small Business), ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) and any other key stakeholders to identify existing training resources, available funding and whether the proposal is a practical alternative to present training initiatives.

The Minya Porlar Creche Project is a collaborative venture between the Jobs Education and Training (JET) Program, the Aboriginal Services Team (Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and Murray Bridge's indigenous community. It was set up as a pilot child care service for the children of Aboriginal parents who were studying or working in Community Development Employment (CDEP) Programs in the Murray Bridge area.

The project aimed to ascertain the ongoing child care needs of the community. Fees at Murray Bridge's mainstream child care centre are amongst the highest in South Australia, and the centre was therefore not seen as a viable option for low income Aboriginal students and CDEP workers. In many cases parents were also reluctant to use mainstream care due to both perceptions that it would not provide for their children's cultural needs and to their own experiences of being discriminated against in 'white' services.

Prior to the creche's establishment, FaCS had been involved in child care discussions with indigenous community leaders for several years without an appropriate model of care being identified. In late 1999 JET staff was approached by the Department to explore the possibility of setting up a JET-funded creche (a temporary care model used by JET to provide care for parents who are training or studying).

The Creche was the result of nine months of consultation and collaborative work between the JET Program, the Department, Murray Bridge Nungas' Club, Tanglun Piltengi Yunti (TPY/CDEP); community members and elders, parents, Aboriginal Training Agencies and the Murray Bridge Child Care Centre (the creche's sponsor agency).

It started operating in May 1999 and now provides care for around 25 pre-school aged children. The creche has had many positive outcomes for the community. Among these are:

- An improvement in children's health and development
- Increased awareness of & use by Aboriginal families of other local Children's Services due to the forging of collaborative links between the creche and family support agencies
- Increased school attendance for older children - an indirect outcome due to the creche daily bus service, which transports older children to school.
- The emergence of a creche-based TAFE training program for Aboriginal child care workers.

One of the main aims and outcomes of providing child care has been that it has enabled a significant number of Aboriginal parents to participate in training, education and employment programs. This is likely to have long term benefits for indigenous families' opportunities and quality of life.

There has been positive feedback about the creche from several Government and non-Government family support agencies. It has also attracted the interest of other Aboriginal communities, some of which have sent representatives to visit Minya Porlar with the idea of setting up similar child care facilities for their own people.

Because the creche was intended as a 'testing of the waters' for establishing a more permanent and substantial child care service, the plan has always been to move on from a JET model (JET creches are limited in the levels of staffing, equipment and administrative funding they operate under. They also do not include capital (one-off) funding to build or to upgrade premises).

The project is ready to enter a new stage, which will look at possible arrangements under which the service can become a viable long term child care centre. Various existing operational and funding models used in the Aboriginal child care sector will be looked at, as well as giving consideration to new models of care which might be developed to meet the community's particular needs.

Within FaCS new Strengthening Families and Communities Strategy, the Department's State offices are exploring innovative approaches to establishing programs for families (both in terms of the types of projects being considered and the way these are funded). Flexible broad banding funding is available for the Stronger Families/Communities initiatives. This opens the possibility of looking at program and service approaches which are outside the norm, and of tailoring services to the needs of particular groups or communities (away from a 'one size fits all' approach).

In the case of Minya Porlar, this has raised the question of whether it becomes a licensed service or something more flexible. Coming to decisions about this will involve exploring various options in consultation with the community. It may also bring new involvement in the project from organisations and Departments such as DETE (licensing) and ATSIC, related to partnerships, cost sharing etc.

The possibility also exists for Minya Porlar to become something much broader than a child care service. There has been talk of it being a training centre for Aboriginal

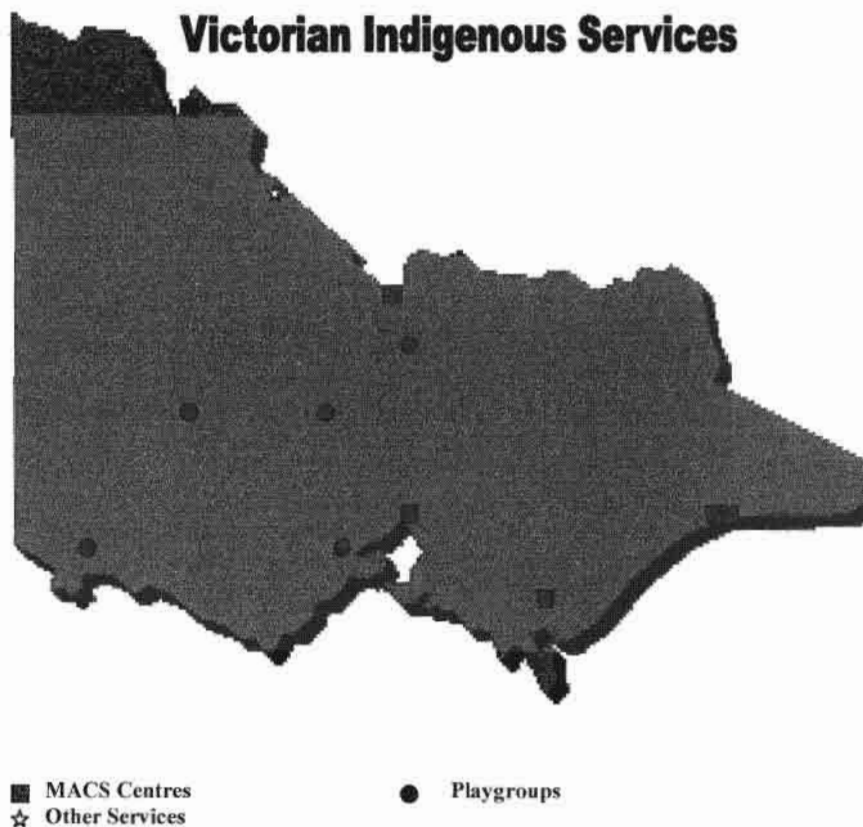
Child care workers, or administering one of the Department of Health & Aged Care's Nutrition Grants, or running a Parenting Support and other programs which will strengthen families and the community as a whole.

Premises are also being looked at related to the possibility for the community to obtain an Education Department building to move onto the Nungas' grounds to become a self contained child care building (it is currently housed within the Nungas' Club building). A partnership arrangement of cost sharing would be looked at to move and upgrade the building and to establish child care and other services (for instance FaCS might provide Capital Upgrading funds and recurrent funding for staffing, equipment, administration etc, and look to other Departments to fund other aspects or expansion of the service). Possible partners could include the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Aboriginal Health Division of the State Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs (DOSAA), Family and Youth Services (DHS) and the State Department of Employment Training and Education (DETE).

The Murray Bridge Creche Project is based within the Family Capabilities Branch of FaCS.

Both the Port Augusta and the Murray Bridge services are unique in their own way and obviously share in the many issues facing our MACS services nationally. These issues should be taken up with all parties on a national level.

8 Victoria



8.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Victoria has an Indigenous population of approximately 22,598 people (according to the ABS statistics).

The seven MAC services (one is closed at present) in Victoria are:

YAPPERA (Inc body)
2B Watt St
THORNBURY 3071

Ph: 03 9416-8787

Fax: 03 9480-0690

MACS places for 35

BUNG YARND
P.O. Box 11
LAKES ENTRANCE 3909

Ph: 03 5156-5718

MACS places for 15

BRAYAKOOLONG
Non operational
P.O. Box 634
BAIRNSDALE 3875

Ph: 03 5152-1985

Fax: 03 5152-3115

MACS places for 25

BARRIMBA
94 Hare St
ECHUCA 3564

Ph: 03 5480-6330

Fax: 03 5482-5104

MACS places for 25

LIDJE (Inc body)
P.O. Box 221
MOOROPNA 3629

Ph: 03 5825-1632

Fax: 03 5825-4511

MACS places for 17

ROBINVALE
P.O. Box 185
ROBINVALE 3549

Ph: 03 5026-3196

Fax: 03 5026-4332

MACS places for 28

GUNAI LIDJI

7-9 Buckley St
MORWELL 3840

Ph: 03 5134-8667

Fax: 03 5134-4881

MACS places for 25

8.2 Issues

For this report the Victorian MACS centres were consulted by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. Their report is below.

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

49 BRUNSWICK STREET FITZROY 3065 PH (0416 38333) FAX (02) 9416 3255
PO BOX 1483 COLLINGWOOD VICTORIA 3066 EMAIL v.aeai@vnet.net.au
REGISTRATION No 3874

VAEAI

The objective of this project was to liaise with the 6 MACS centres in Victoria and compile a State report to outline current issues, needs, trends and developments in the provision of child care to Koorie families.

This report:

- Summarises the consultations with the Koorie communities on their needs for children's services;
- Draws conclusions from their comments; and on the basis of this; and
- Recommends strategies to better meet identified needs and to develop more flexible management models for services in their communities.

Methodology

- Discussion was held with Lionel Bamblett, General Manager and Lowana Moore of VAEAI.
- The 6 MACS were visited and discussions held with the Coordinator and interested parties.
- A group discussion was held with representatives from Lidje MACS (Rose Bamblett also Early Childhood representative, Mary Atkinson, Sharon Bamblett and Katherine Basch); Njernda MACS, Echuca (Melva Johnson, Vicki Mitchell); and Robinvale MACS (Jennifer Mitchell).
- Meeting at Morwell with Brendan O'Kane (CEO) and with Lorraine Peake (Coordinator), Norma Lukes (Wanjana Lidj, Family Preservation Program), Troy McDonald (Coordinator, D&A Program).
- Meeting at Lake Tyers with Joan Saunders (Chairperson), Julie Saunders, Cheryl Maynard, Siva Nalliah (Accountant).
- Previous consultation papers were revisited and in particular quotes were taken from "Aboriginal MACS and KOORIE PROGRAMS REVIEW 1997" prepared by the author for the Department of Family and Community Services.

Background

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) have operated since 1987. They were designed by the Commonwealth with little, if at all, consultation with the Aboriginal community to help communities with their child care needs.

In the words of the National MACS Committee in the MACS National Policy 2nd Draft Report 1992:

"This service is provided primarily to ensure that the cultural, physical and social-emotional well-being of Aboriginal children is catered for. It aims to create a state of readiness so that children will have the best chance of survival and personal success in a traditional school environment where they have historically been disadvantaged."

Over the 13 years of their existence the 7 Victorian MACS have gone through ups and downs and 6 have survived. They were in theory designed to be multifunctional services and yet at the origin, only one (Lake Tyers) was purpose built and for 15 places! The others were existing child care services operating in more or less dilapidated buildings; 2 were fairly small: Mooroopna (17 places), Yappera (15 places). All centres received capital upgrading over the years and Robinvale, Yappera, Bairnsdale (State funding) got new buildings. No additional MACS places were available, though and Yappera received 20 mainstream add-on places; Lidge, however, only managed to get approval for 18 "fee relief only" places.

Further those services could not really function as true multifunctional, as there were no special facilities either for Out of School Hours Care, or for Vacation Care and none for the Youth.

They were all sponsored by the existing Local Aboriginal Co-Operatives at the start, except for Yappera. Subsequently, with ATSIC cuts, Lake Tyers and Lidge transferred to incorporated bodies. Brayakoloong, in Bairnsdale, had some management and licensing issues, such that it has suspended the operation of its child care service.

They all, through good management, succeeded in living within their allocated budget, although it was at the expense of programs for the older age groups. The greatest success occurred this year, which will see 25 Koorie child care staff graduate from their Diploma in Community Services-Child care courses. A great achievement indeed. Currently Macquarie University has approached VAEAL for a 5-yr part time course for external Koorie students.

Summary of consultations with MACS organisations

8.2.1 The Organisations

- Three of the six MACS services are sponsored by Aboriginal cooperatives. Yappera in Northcote is self-sponsored; Lidge MACS in Mooroopna has transferred from Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-op Ltd to a Committee of Management that runs Lidge MACS Aboriginal Corporation; Bung Yamda has transferred from Lake Tyers Trust to Lake Tyers Health & Children's Services Association Incorporated.

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- All the sponsoring organisations offer a host of services covering all aspects of Aboriginal life and culture.

Issues

- The differing structures make group decisions difficult to achieve, as the Co-operative services have to get all decisions approved by the Board of Coordinators.
- The Committee of Management is made up of parents, all volunteers who often do not have the time or are not skilled enough to take up the complex administration functions. These, as a consequence, fall upon the shoulders of the coordinators in addition to their normal duties.
- Coordinators are faced with budget constraints, administration difficulties, such as the GST; hence the vital importance of VAEAI.
- In cases of funding or maintenance emergencies, not having any surplus funds or other sources of funding they can only turn to the funding bodies for assistance.

Recommendations

- Management and administration training be made available to coordinators and assistant coordinators;
- The Commonwealth continue Capital funding rounds on a Tri-annual basis.

8.2.2 Community Support

Community participation ranges from a few parents actively sitting on Committees of Management to complete trust in the MACS staff to care for the needs of the children without interference. Communication with parents, in general, is very time consuming, as it has to be verbal. Due to poor literacy skills or other impinging matters, parents very rarely read notices.

Issues

As a result, the task of policy formulation falls again on the shoulders of the Coordinators and their staff. Furthermore, it becomes difficult to implement Commonwealth Accreditation principles and State regulations, which relate to parent participation.

Recommendations

The Commonwealth should provide additional funding to VAEAI to enable them to work with the MACS services to:

- Implement a communication strategy to inform parents of the services the MACS can provide and encourage them to participate in implementing these;
- Ensure all centres have updated Centre policies which include the philosophy of the service;
- Implement a communication strategy to inform services of changes in policy; write informed articles on aspects of programming and service delivery;

communicate in a consolidated form the "best practices" in Aboriginal services in Victoria and in other states.

8.2.3 Staffing

Qualified staff are like gold dust, says Joan Saunders of Lake Tyers. All the MACS centres have difficulty recruiting and retaining trained staff- in Lake Tyers, because of the remoteness of the place, the community is constantly on the move, and it is difficult to engage even peripheral staff, like the bus driver.

State regulations insist on trained staff being on the premises at all times. Yappera, in Metropolitan Melbourne, find it difficult to employ replacement qualified staff when the regular staff are on leave. They have to have recourse, at great costs, to the Employment Agency staff.

With the proclamation of the new State Government's Children's Regulations in 1997, MACS services were no longer exempt from the requirements of qualified staff. Bung Yarrda and Brayakoloong had difficulties to comply with licensing requirements. Bung Yarrda survived; Brayakoloong had to suspend its operation.

To help overcome the problem of qualified staff in MACS services, the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), implemented the use of Training for Aboriginal Program (TAP) Employment strategies funding to provide training support for those workers willing to commit themselves to upgrading their level of skill.

- Existing child care workers were provided with paid leave of at least one day per week in order to undertake the Diploma of Child Care Services;
- The cost of the paid leave was met by DEETYA and paid to the employing organisation as required upon successful annual review of the trainees program.

As a result, as mentioned previously, in December, 21 Koorie staff will graduate from their course as fully trained Child care staff.

Macquarie University has recently shown interest in providing a 5-year part time course for Koorie staff more or less on the same terms.

8.2.4 Other Issues

MACS staff in general feel ignored. Again because of budget constraints, MACS staff cannot meet and exchange ideas.

Recommendations

- Regular regional meetings, where staff could share their experience;
- At least annually, a state meeting where issues affecting the operation of the service would be discussed; for example, licensing regulations, food regulations, mandatory reporting;
- Coordinators should meet regularly at the State level and at the National level. (Most of the current coordinators cannot remember when the last National Conference was held.)
- There should be more networking with the other Commonwealth funded services as well as with other Early Childhood services;
- There is an urgent need for in-service training for all issues affecting the operation of the service; state regulations; Commonwealth funding; industrial issues; management issues; OH&S issues (only recently, for example, did one coordinator learn that there were different kinds of fire extinguishers and how to use them);
- The Commonwealth should work closely with VAEAI, with other Government departments, and with educational institutions;
 1. To ensure opportunities continue to exist for Koorie staff to gain their qualifications;
 2. To ensure funding is available for replacement staff in such circumstances.

8.2.5 Accreditation

There was a high degree of hostility towards the Accreditation process at the beginning as no consultations were held with our communities. There are still very few Aboriginal Reviewers nationally and no Moderator we are aware of in Victoria.

Denise Taylor, at the SNAICC conference in Townsville, in July 1997, made it quite clear to the MACS representatives that, although the Department strongly encourages the participation of the MACS in the process, the objective was to attain a higher level of quality care. Consequently:

- Their participation was not a prerequisite for entitlement to (then)CA;
- They may withdraw from the process at any time;
- They will be reviewed, if they proceed, on the Principles, based on the Policy of their centre.

The MACS had one or two Workshops with Lady Gowrie staff, but the whole project was subsequently put on hold for various reasons:

- Lady Gowrie staff were not on the same "cultural wave length" and could not quite understand the Koorie ways of servicing the needs of Koorie children;
- Most of the staff were undertaking studies towards a child care diploma (25 will graduate at the end of the year);
- The MACS will rather now use the tutors from the University of Ballarat;
- The cost issues will have to be addressed;
- MACS, however, would like to see more Koorie reviewers, now that more staff are qualified (this could mean that some of the requirements to become a Reviewer might have to be waived for Koories).

Recommendations

- The Commonwealth facilitate the employment of Koorie Reviewers and mentors to enable the MACS to implement the Accreditation principles.

8.2.6 State Regulations

One view is that there are far too many State regulations, and some of the Inspectors are no better than the Welfare Officers of olden days. State regulations, such as they are, may be good for community based services, but certainly detract from the Koorie way of servicing Koorie kids. Most feel that currently they cannot manage their own programs, as they have constantly to worry about the regulations. There seems to be at least one regulation for every single activity, including, in the case of Echuca, for example, properly signed excursion notices to move the children from one part of the building to another.

Another view is that State regulations help maintain standards and prevent some members of the community from making undue demands on the service.

However, all agree that because of State regulations, they are limited in the number of programs they can offer, and the number of children they can service.

Recommendations

- The Commonwealth work closely with the State and with VAEA1 to ensure State Regulations do not detract from the philosophy of our services and prevent us from providing an efficient service which will fulfill the cultural, social and emotional well-being of our children;
- Training be available to enable our services to implement those regulations.

8.2.7 Venues

One common complaint of MACS coordinators is that the MACS are too small to be truly multifunctional. The Commonwealth now wants to achieve its Outcomes of Stronger Families, Stronger Communities, outcomes which we have always advocated. We are aware that there is a need for more programs for our Youth, for Parents, but there are no venues for such to be held, or the other necessary resources.

Robinvale operates its Vacation Care program in conjunction with the City of Swan Hill program. Echuca and Morwell use the Youth Houses at times. Yappera uses the Aboriginal Youth Club and the Aboriginal Advancement League venue. Lidge and Bung Yamda being far from the town centres of Shepparton and Lakes Entrance respectively, experience significant difficulties.

Currently Robinvale would like to be a true Multifunctional with Preschool attached to it as well as the Maternal & Child Health Service. Lidge may have to relocate as Rumbalara negotiates the use of the centre for its Health programs. Lidge itself, however, would rather be in the centre of Shepparton, with Batdja, if Capital funds were available for the extension of the existing premises.

Recommendations

- The Commonwealth embark on a program of Capital funding to enable the MACS to be truly multifunctional and serve the needs of the community.

8.2.8 Transport

Lack of transport affects all programs. There is virtually no public transport in those country towns where the MACS are situated. A good number of the MACS clients have no private means of transportation.

The 6 MACS would agree with the National MACS Committee (Attachment A) that most of their activities could not operate without the use of a vehicle. The vehicles are used throughout the day for:

- Transporting children to and from the long day care, playgroup, kinder;
- Workshops, meetings;
- Liaison work;
- Emergencies.

In the afternoon, when the special services activities are running, great collaboration is required to make the best use of the vehicle. Given the requirements of the long day care and OSHC children, vacation care activities, such as excursions are particularly difficult to run. The size of the vehicle precludes any large-scale activity.

The Department seems to expect changeovers of about \$40,000 while even a 19-seater bus currently costs around \$72,000.

Recommendation

- The Commonwealth revise its Replacement vehicles guidelines to take into account current costs; the size of vehicles needed. To note that a second vehicle is needed in all MACS for emergencies, for day to day activities, like shopping, for the Coordinator to attend meetings

8.2.9 MACS Places

The MACS deplore the fact that no additional MACS places have been available since the inception of this service type. Currently the MACS are well utilised, but cannot expand. Most can offer sessional care only to enable as many Koorie children as possible to gain access. Lake Tyers (15 places) and Lidje (17 places) are not cost effective and have a high break even cost, and consequently a high gap fee.

	0-1	0-2	1-3	2-3	3-5	5-12	12-18
Robinvale	15		10		7	45	10
Berrimba	6		11		25	15	8
Lidje	4		14		17	20	20
Yappera		17		18	25	30	15
Gunai Lidj	1		21		31	30	
Bung Yarrda		10		6	9	15	

As mentioned previously, Lidje in Mooroopna, is considering relocating to the town centre of Shepparton where most of their clients live. The existing building is licensed for 35 places, but receive MACS funding for 17 places only. Robinvale (28 places), Morwell (25 places) would like another 2 and 5 additional places respectively.

We cannot understand how such an important service type has been so neglected by the Commonwealth Planning Team. With the implementation of Child Care Benefit in July 2000, for example, all service types receive a new Handbook, except for the MACS. Our Handbook dates back to 1987. And yet, statistics show that the MACS play an important role for the Koorie communities; children who have access to MACS achieve far better than those who do not. Currently there is a high demand for more MACS places across the State.

Recommendations

- The Commonwealth acknowledge the importance of the MACS to the Aboriginal communities;
- The Commonwealth consider the needs of Aborigines in its establishment of High Needs Areas;
- The Commonwealth allocate appropriate Recurrent and Broadband funding for additional MACS places.

8.2.10 Funding

Since 1992, when the National Office of the Department of Family and Community Services stopped approving our budgets, funding has in real terms decreased. The implementation of Child Care Benefit, in July 2000, has provided some relief.

In 1992, all MACS in Victoria received funding for an Outreach Worker, Out of School Hours Care, Vacation Care and vehicle expenses. Currently only 3 services can afford an Outreach Worker, one of them part time, and 3 services have had to cut their OSHC programs.

The funding formula is in fact inequitable. The MACS, in Victoria, are operating very cost effectively, and well within the average of mainstream services. The break-even fees range from \$149 for a 25-place centre to \$235 for the 15-place centre, with an average of \$173. \$235 per child place seems excessively high. However, in Victoria, a 15 place centre has the same staffing costs as a 25 place centre, and consequently, relatively speaking, the \$235 is equivalent to \$141 for a 25 place centre.

Because of the funding formula, Lake Tyers, who is otherwise disadvantaged, has a gap fee of \$122 per child place and Lidje (17 places) a gap fee of \$75.

Special Services (Broadband) allocation is used to cover those huge gap fees and as a result, we all have to cut back on our services.

Costs will continue to rise. The new State Regulations have imposed a high level of staffing in child care services; we must have qualified staff present at all times. Volunteers cannot be counted in the required staffing ratio. Most of our services have qualified staff currently and this is good for our children. However qualified staff are very expensive to employ and the funding formula takes no account of this fact.

The department's representatives have advised us of the new objectives of the department. We would be more than happy to provide services, which would build up our families and our communities, especially as we have always believed that such was the true purpose of the MACS. However, no additional funding has been provided for this purpose.

Recommendations

- The Department of Family and Community Services should increase the funding for the MACS, in such a way as to enable them to provide services in line with the objectives of the department itself.

8.2.11 Fees

The 6 MACS have fee-charging policies for Long day care and Special Services, although Bung Yarnda finds it impractical to charge fees. Working parents are expected to contribute according to their capacity to pay.

Fee collection remains a challenge, however, for all the MACS. Most of the clients may be working parents, but they are on low wages, some CDEP workers. Coordinators find income assessments difficult as this often leads to mistrust and ill feelings, resulting in parents withdrawing children from the services. The level of unpaid contribution is fairly high. Yappera, in Metropolitan Melbourne, can afford to enforce fee payments. In rural areas, coordinators, who, themselves, live in the communities are concerned and often find the hard decision more difficult to make. In the end, they say, it is the children who suffer.

The implementation of Child Care Benefit in July 2000 removed for mainstream services the requirement of the minimum fee. In theory, this should mean that the CIT, more commonly known in Victoria as the DIT (Department Income Target) no longer exists. In practice, however, an income of the same level has been included in the 2000/01 budgets. We note that the minimum rate in MACS has always been higher than in mainstream services as there is no discounted rate for multiple children.

Recommendations

- The Department of Family and Community Services, when it reviews funding for MACS, should take account of the difficulties faced by the MACS to collect fees.

8.2.12 Accountability

The MACS in Victoria have always been required to submit annual financial statements. They have done this at great costs, although the figures, as we should expect, did not generally show surplus funds. Indications of achievements were derived from anecdotal evidence, constant contact with the communities, through the annual budget process and from the departmental Census figures.

Our communities, however, doubt the accuracy of the Census figures. This may be due to the fact that the coordinators have difficulty with the wording of the questions, or the fact they do not give the census the attention it deserves.

Recommendations

- The Department of Family and Community Services simplify its financial requirements for MACS services; and
- Ensure that proper statistics are collected from the MACS.

Difficulties in providing services for children

Long Day Care

The services have waiting lists. As mentioned previously, if larger venues and recurrent funding were available, they would be able to service more clients.

Currently the services are old and in constant need of high cost maintenance.

Community participation in the administration of services is not high, and finding and keeping qualified - and non qualified- staff a challenge.

Budgeting is difficult, as we have no other sources of income. Any increases in day to day costs, such as petrol prices, or staff increases in award wages can only be met through cuts in other areas. Usually it is the older age groups, which suffer.

Out of School Hours Care

Aboriginal organisations see OSHC as an important element of a child's education. In the words of the National MACS Committee:

"It is imperative that the achievements of the MACS program are not undermined due to a lack of continued support for the children when they reach primary school age. One way to overcome this problem is to provide after hours care and supervision. This takes the form of educational and recreational activities and homework classes. Participation in such activities outside of school hours perpetuates the positive self-image of our children through association with Aboriginal role models and peers. This service also tends to neutralise any negative influences that our children may encounter in the school system and promotes an on going Aboriginal cultural orientation. Another of the 'intangibles' of the Outside School Hours Care program is that because it involves group participation in activities and excursions, it melds in with the Aboriginal culture in as much as this is communal by nature, and therefore reinforces the extended family feeling."

Only 3 services can offer OSHC, the 3 others rely on the programs offered by DETYA.

Vacation Care

The 6 services offer Vacation care. These activities are an integral part of the education of our youth. The young people at Lake Tyers, for example, living on the Trust, thirty minutes by car from the nearest town, rely entirely on activities provided by Bung Yarnnda MACS.

Lack of funding is the biggest issue. It is also difficult to conduct day long activities as the Commonwealth funded vehicle is not only too small for the number of participants but is also needed by the Long Day Care service for the transport of children.

Outreach Worker

The original rationale for an Outreach Worker in the MACS was the need to reach out to the communities and promote children's services generally. This role is now obsolete perhaps, but there are definitely functions that the Coordinator of the long day care service cannot fulfil.

Coordinators in the original budgets were allocated 1-hour administration time for every 2 approved places. These days administration has become more complex with current State, Commonwealth, Local Government regulations; staff issues; children's issues; parent issues. There is still a need to communicate with parents face to face, and for the Special Services to:

- Develop programs
- Monitor special needs of Koorie children
- Develop links with other centres and funded bodies
- Compile newspaper and media material
- Home visits
- Conduct parent and children's activities
- Help parents with their forms.

The National MACS Committee considered that this worker should be named the "MACS SUPPORT WORKER" and their functions should include all of the above including what may be considered the traditional functions of the Commonwealth Children's Services Resource Development Officer (CSRDO) and those of the State Welfare Officer.

- The Commonwealth should ensure the MACS have sufficient funding to employ a Worker as defined above.

Promotion

Promotion of the services is done variously through:

- Koori mail
- Community radio
- Meetings
- Word of mouth
- The cooperative
- Aboriginal agencies
- Local council
- Mainstream services
- Internet

General comments

The MACS generally see an urgent need for:

- Restructuring the funding to enable them to be more responsive to the changing needs of their respective communities;
- Better links between the organisation and staff;
- More parent participation;
- Greater incentives and opportunities for staff training;
- More funding opportunities for cultural activities for the youth

In the health area, the MACS would like to see in all communities programs for;

- Eye testing;
- Speech therapy;
- Control of diabetes;
- Drug & substance abuse;
- Prevention of heart diseases;
- Health & hygiene with special focus on infectious diseases;
- Domestic violence & homelessness;

And more generally;

- More foster care places;
- Housing for the aged.

8.3 Summary

The problems facing our communities are by no means insurmountable. They need, however, a coordinated plan of action and well-defined strategies.

8.3.1 Children 0-12

The MACS, it is agreed, play an important role in the development of our children. They should continue to play this role for all our children.

- The existing **services**, wherever possible, should be expanded, more services built, more places allocated so that all Koorie children can have access.
- Existing qualified **staff** should be encouraged to upgrade their skills; unqualified staff, interested Koories urged to get their qualifications;
- Updated programs should be prepared for the **preschoolers**;
- **Kindergarten** programs should be integrated within the MACS. However well the children do at the MACS, there is a significant drop out rate from schools. This may be due to the fact that they enter school at a disadvantage: mainstream kindergartens do not always serve our children well. They cannot adapt and are behind when they enter school and are never able to catch up. They should get the opportunity to learn to read, write, count at the MACS;
- **Out of School Care programs** should be extended to continue the good work done by the MACS preschool staff.

8.3.2 Youth

Our youth remains our greatest challenge. Because of budget constraints, lack of space, lack of appropriate venues, qualified staff and other resources, they have been neglected. In the mid 1990s, says Melva Johnson, Rose Bamblett, Mary Atkinson, the Commonwealth funded YAS programs filled up the vacuum, but these programs are effectively no longer operational.

Our Youth are "lost" cry Norma Lukies and Troy McDonald. They have no sense of belonging, living between two worlds. They have no incentive to achieve at school, have to become providers at an early age, and very soon face the pitfalls of substance abuse, violence, homelessness, despair, and suicide. A high number of children are "chroming", some as young as 8. The Police cannot cope and, very inappropriately, refer them to the D & A program.

For Joan Saunders of Lake Tyers, a certificate for a Koorie is a certificate to nowhere; it certainly looks good in a frame but does not give access to any mainstream jobs. Consequently trained youth find themselves in the CDEP program and wonder why they have studied.

There is a need for a trained Youth Worker who understands the needs of the community. This worker would be a mentor; would create bridging opportunities; would organise recreational and educational activities and help our Youth regain their self-esteem and a proper sense of values.

- The MACS should have enough resources to provide appropriate programs for the Youth:
 1. Additional funding
 2. Proper venues
 3. Youth worker
 4. Transport

8.3.3 Parents

The above strategies will not succeed, however, if appropriate **Parenting Programs** do not complement them. Parents should be empowered; their parenting skills developed; a greater awareness of and pride in their cultural identity instilled in them, such that they can pass these values on to their children.

- SNAICC should sponsor Parenting programs
- The issues will need to be handled with much sensitivity
- Appropriately trained Koorie staff should run them
- Train the trainer courses should be organised
- Any such programs will have to be endorsed by the Victorian MACS group

8.3.4 VAEAI

VAEAI is currently a great resource for the MACS. Their role should be expanded with additional funding such that they can:

- Continue their existing functions
- Coordinate all the different activities recommended above in conjunction with other Aboriginal organisations
- Liaise closely with the funding bodies regarding the needs of the Koorie communities
- Liaise with the Commonwealth and the State regarding the Accreditation principles and Children's Services Regulations respectively
- Liaise with the funding bodies, Universities, TAFE colleges regarding staff needs
- Liaise with Commonwealth, State, Local Government departments regarding programs for children, Out of School Hours Care, Vacation Care, Youth, Parents, Committees of Management

8.3.5 Technology

At the close of the APEC conference in November 2000, the Prime Minister recognised the importance of the Internet as a means of bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots. All mainstream services were given the opportunity of a grant of \$1500 last July if they submit 2 quarterly statements on discs. We have been ignored.

- Grants should be made available to Koorie services to buy computers as necessary and be connected to the internet
- Better use made of this rapid means of communication to connect the department, Koorie organisations with Koorie services
- Koorie resources should be made available on the net
- All the 37 MACS should be linked, such that they can exchange information, resources, and best practices.

8.4 Playgroups

- Playgroups usually cater for children up to the age of approximately six. They are basically self-help programs set up by parents. The sessions are informal gatherings on a regular basis in a home, church hall, and preschool or other appropriate buildings.
- Aboriginal playgroups are an extension of this concept. While parent participation is considered desirable and should be encouraged, it is not considered essential that children be accompanied by a parent at all times.
- Aboriginal playgroups run on culturally appropriate lines, encouraging children to learn and appreciate their traditions.
- These Playgroups are situated throughout the state and seem very unique to Victoria and maybe also Western Australia in the way they are run. They quite often are run on the off times to the pre-school hours.

8.4.1 Playgroups names and addresses

WINDA MARA

P.O. Box 215
HEYWOOD 3304

Ph: 03 5527-2051

HORSHAM

P.O. Box 523
HORSHAM 3400

Ph: 03 5362-2600

Fax: 03 5362-2610

DJA DJA WRUNG

13-15 Forest Street
BENDIGO 3550

Ph: 03 5544- 5367

Fax: 03 5544-6476

BATJA

P.O.Box 6294
SHEPPARTON 3632

Ph: 03 5831-5479

Fax: 03 5831-5769

WAUTHARONG

P.O. Box 402
NORTH GEELONG 3215

Ph: 03 5277-0372

Fax: 03 5277-4123

8.5 Other Support Services in Victoria

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)

Since 1995 VAEAI has been funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide independent Aboriginal community advice and professional development for the MACS centres and Aboriginal playgroups.

VAEAI

49 Brunswick St
FITZROY 3065

Ph: 03 9416-3833

Fax: 03 9416-3255



The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) was established in 1976 as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (VAECG). At the time, the aim was to promote greater involvement by the Koorie (Victorian name for an Indigenous person or persons) community to forums of the VAECG. Due to the success of the promotional activities of the VAECG, the organisation became an incorporated body in 1985 and the VAECG was formally registered as the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated.

VAEAI aims to promote access and equity for Koories through the development of education programs that are culturally relevant, reinforcing Koorie identity and providing supportive learning environments. It also aims to provide to the wider community an awareness of Koorie cultures and educational aspirations. VAEAI is a statewide Koorie community organisation consisting of eight regions. These regions are divided on the basis of family ties and a number of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LACE's) comprise each region. VAEAI represents LAECG's from all Koorie communities on policy advice at the local, state and national levels.

In the early 1990's, two major developments took place that not only enhanced VAEAI's functions but also elevated the status of the organisation's operations. In 1990 the relationship between the Victorian Koorie community and the Ministry of Education (now known as the Department of Education) was formalized with the

Partnership in Education: Koorie Education Policy that aims to address the 21 goals of the National Aboriginal Education Policy.

Also in 1990, VAEAI was formally recognized as holding the same status as an Industry Training Board. VAEAI's role as an Industry Training Board is to provide advice on the development of and access to, relevant programs that will provide skills training to members of the Koorie communities.

Early in 1997 saw the launch of the Koorie 2000 Strategy. This signifies another major step forward for Koorie education, strengthening and formalizing the involvement of Koorie people in education, all decision-making and building on the Partnership in Education between the VAEAI and the Department of Education.

This organisation works a lot with the Victorian MACS and has representatives from their services on their consultative Groups. The VAEAI Regions and all the LAECGs Locations are on the following page.

Secretariat of the National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care (S.N.A.I.C.C.)



S.N.A.I.C.C. is the National umbrella organisation of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCA's). It is also the national body for the MACS. It recently received Commonwealth funding to conduct a national review of the MACS.

S.N.A.I.C.C.

Ph: (03) 9417 6744

VACCA Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Association

VACCA operates under the S.N.A.I.C.C. umbrella. They provide family support to Aboriginal families throughout Victoria, helping families under stress to overcome their problems. VACCA offers an extended care program, which includes emergency, short or long term care, as well as pre-adoptive, and reception extended care. Placement is sought initially with a member of the child's extended family, or with other members of the child's community who have the correct relationship in accordance with Aboriginal customary law.

VACCA
34 Wurruk Ave
Preston
Victoria 3072

Ph: 03 9471-1855
Fax: 03 9471-1898

Children's Services Resource Development Officers (CSRDO's)

CSRDO workers provide a range of services to local children's services. They work with service providers to improve quality of care.

They perform various duties such as, helping to organise and/or leading in-service training in relevant topics for child care services; identifying available resources and providing information (including details of additional available services) to parents; developing strategies to attract potential users.

CSRDO's do not have the responsibility for hands-on work; supervision of children, relief work when child care workers are sick and domestic tasks.

Swan Hill CSRDO
Rosalie Connelly
P.O. Box 1070
Swan Hill 3585

Ph: 03 5032 2964

8.6 A positive story Yappera (MACS) in Victoria

One of the Victorian MACS centres had a wonderful article written by Anne Crawford, which appeared in The Age on August 15th 2000.

So cool for Koori kids

The traditional dance? The face painting? No, it was the inflatable jumping castle they liked the most. The kinder group at Yappera Children's Service, arms straining in the air, are recalling National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, early August.

"I jumped - just like Tigger!" says five-year-old Jesse Walton. Hayden McNally, also five, took another approach: "I went on my bum and my foots!"

They seem to have overlooked how they crowded around the Olympic torchbearer, Aboriginal elder Alan Brown, with the black torches they'd made with red and yellow flames. Until five year old Monique Squires pipes up: "Uncle Alan bringed his real torch!"

They've temporarily forgotten how they looked up bug eyed as the big boys from Northland Secondary College daubed their bodies with ochre and danced. Then, with a bit of prompting, they remember, recreating the kangaroos in one of the dances, fingers waving on their heads for ears, jumping around.

When Yappera eventually sends these children into the world, it will be the kangaroos, the cultural heritage that will stay with them long after they've forgotten the inflatable castle.

Yappera Children's Service was created in a semi-industrial street of Fitzroy in 1980. There was a high concentration of Koori families in the area then who couldn't afford the fees at other child care centres. They weren't always comfortable going to them, either. They felt they weren't "culturally relevant", says the coordinator, Donna Wright.

Wright grapples with this notion. She doesn't want to sound negative, wants to avoid words such as "alienation" as she tries to convey how a Koori person can feel in a mainstream environment.

"We're all very close, lots of family, it's a close knit community. Once you're blood, you're blood. It's this feeling you get knowing you're blood, that security. You feel comfortable, relaxed, and safe.

"Back then there was a lot of negative stuff, stereotyping about Kooris. It was important that our preschool program gave the children a sense of pride in their identity. We wanted to make sure that when they went out into the community that they felt good about themselves."

The waiting lists lengthened and the centre outgrew itself. Yappera also needed a preschool. It reopened in 1992 in a new building in Thornbury, on land behind the Aborigines Advancement League. A black-and-white enlargement on the wall shows

a bulldozer full of excited children on the construction site. A poster nearby says, "Koori kids are cool".

Sixty children now attend (from the 0 – 2years old)"boorais" (the word "boora" covers babies, pregnancy and children), the joeys (two to three years), wombats (three to four) and the preschool "crocodiles".

All but three are Aboriginal. The non-Koori children were invited to enroll in the preschool when three vacancies arose. "They presented a bit of a challenge," says Wright. "We were worried about meeting the needs of non-Koori families."

They wondered how they'd go with the staff that speaks Koori English. Similar to slang, Koori English is a recognised language in Victoria - but not in schools. For example, "yeaheh" for yes, "deadly" for great or excellent, "Auntie" instead of Miss for the teacher.

Wright needn't have worried: "We have three lovely children, happy families!"

Yappera means, "belonging place"- No barriers. It invites non-Kooris to visit because that's the best way for outsiders to understand the culture - by listening and talking.

Yappera is one of seven Multifunctional Aboriginal Child Services (MACS) in Victoria. The MACS provide dental care, immunisation, eye and ear tests, and a philosophy of strengthening culture. They take the children on cultural and bush excursions and teach them how to handle racial taunts and how to give non-Kooris an understanding of what they're about.

Yappera puts Aboriginal parents in touch with services such as housing, health, and neonatal care and with each other. The centre is bringing in people who haven't previously identified themselves as being Aboriginal. "There was a whole lot who didn't identify. They thought they weren't black enough," says Delta Vidler, a Koori preschool worker.

Many of the families live nearby; others travel from Roxburgh Park, Mill Park, North Balwyn or Whittlesea. Urban families, traditional families. The Nunga people in Western and South Australia, the Murrís from Queensland, the Kooris from Victoria and New South Wales.

You have to take cultural differences into account, says Wright, not offend anyone. One couple, for instance, gave their daughter the traditional name, Wungarralyanggan ("baby born, long way, young one"). Wright practised it to get the pronunciation right. It's just respect.

Yappera is run by an all-Koori committee of management and has 20 to 30 staff, most of them Aboriginal.

Koori staff say they often find the government regulations binding the centre – "the regs" - at odds with their ways of childrearing, with the sense of freedom Aboriginal children are traditionally given. "The regulations are very frustrating if you've been brought up a Koori," says Wright. "It's that laying down the law thing with Kooris - it goes back to assimilation." The "regs" mean having to wear shoes and not being able

to climb trees. "Now they climb fake climbing equipment," says Vidler. "When I was a kid I lived in trees. It's a shame what kids miss out on."

When they leave Yappera, most of the children go to one of two primary schools in Thornbury. At first, they forget to call the teachers by their names, calling them "Auntie" or "Uncle" instead, but the transitions have been successful, says Vidler. It helps that they already have cousins and friends at school: Thornbury Primary School has an Aboriginal population of 70 and employs two Koori educators. The schools report back that the Yappera children have advanced social, writing and gross motor skills, she says.

Some come back to visit. Two of the Northland Secondary School dancers went to Yappera, Wright says, recalling that she once changed their nappies. Not that she'd embarrass them by mentioning their "mooms" (bottoms), she laughs. "It's really wonderful. Here are these big boys coming over and saying, 'Hi, Auntie', very respectful. They're proud of the fact that they were once Yappera kids."

9 New South Wales

New South Wales Indigenous Services



- MACS Centres
- Playgroups
- ☾ Mobile Services

- ☆ Special Services - LDC
- ⊙ Special Services - OSHC

9.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

New South Wales has an Indigenous population of approximately 109,925 people (according to the ABS statistics)

There are twelve MACS centres in New South Wales.

Allira MACS Child Care Centre

✓ 151 Fitzroy Street
Dubbo NSW 2830

Ph: 02 6882-9503

Fax: 02 6884-3693

Licensed for 40 places

Licensed for 40 places

Murawina Mt Druitt Coop Ltd

✓ Postal:

PO Box 429

Mount Druitt NSW 2770

Location:

Cnr Lisbon Street and Carlisle Avenue

Mount Druitt NSW 2770

Ph: 02 9625-2371

Fax: 02 9625-4325

Licensed for 60 places

Awabakal MACS Child Care Centre

5 Grey Street

✓ Wickham NSW 2293

Ph: 02 4961-6429

Fax: 02 4940-0548

Licensed for 40 places

✓ Ngaku MACS

Postal:

PO Box 342

Kempsey NSW 2440

Location:

H. Brahm Close

Kempsey NSW 2440

Ph: 02 6562-8744

Fax: 02 6563-1526

Licensed for 40 places

Birreelee MACS Child Care Centre

32 MacGregor Street

✓ Tamworth NSW 2340

Ph: 02 6765-3470

Fax: 02 6765-9141

Licensed for 39 places

Gujaga Multifunctional Aboriginal Child Care Centre MACS

✓ Postal:

PO Box 102

Matraville NSW 2036

Location:

Elaroo Avenue

La Perouse

Matraville NSW 2036

Ph: 02 9661-6097

Fax: 02 9694-1239

Noogaleek Child Care Centre

Postal:

PO Box 81

Berkeley NSW 2506

Location:

Dennis Street

Berkeley NSW 2506

Ph: 02 4271-8468

Fax: 02 4272-4906

Licensed for 39 places

Tharawal MACS Centre

Postal:

✓ PO Box 290

Campbelltown NSW 2560

Location:

Cnr Riverside Drive and Elizabeth

Airds

Campbelltown NSW 2560

Ph: 02 4628-4837

Fax: 02 4628-2725

Licensed for 35 places

Towri MACS

Postal:

PO Box 1873

Bathurst NSW 2795

✓ Location:

Lloyds Road

Bathurst NSW 2795

Ph: 02 6332-1467

Fax: 02 6332-4829

Licensed for 40 places

Wiradjuri Neighbourhood Centre

Postal:

✓ PO Box 50

Wagga Wagga NSW 2650

Location:

155 Dockers St

Wagga Wagga NSW 2650

Ph: 02 6921-2108

Fax: 02 6931-8044

Licensed for 32 places

✓ **Wreck Bay MACS**

Summercloud Road

Wreck Bay NSW 2540

Ph: 02 4442-1131

Fax: 02 4442-1131

Licensed for 15 places

Yalbillunga Boori Day Care

Postal:

PO Box 497

Cowra NSW 2794

✓ Location:

Legh Street

Cowra NSW 2794

Ph: 02 6342-1300

Fax: 02 6341-4168

Licensed for 39 places

9.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. Therefore, under each section there may be a difference of opinion on some issues.

9.2.1 Training and Staffing

Common issues from centres

- It is quite common for qualified staff in our centres to be predominantly non-Aboriginal e.g. Early Child Care Teachers, Advanced Child Care Workers and Registered Nurses.
- Aboriginal staff in general, hold unqualified positions, but are seen as an **essential part of our services**.
- Mature age staff with experience in this field are vital to us as they provide the cultural and compassion to both the children and other staff in the centre.
- Mature age workers should get recognition for experience and prior learning and not be forced into mainstream courses to gain qualifications.
- Some MACS utilize CDEP workers to supplement staff numbers and this helps because of all of the extra services we provide.
- Staffing of MACS is based on mainstream regulations according to the States. Staff/children ratios. We believe that all MACS should have permanent support staff so that children with special needs can be given the "one on one" attention needed.
- A permanent Aboriginal Cultural worker should also be a part of a MACS services.
- We need more qualified Aboriginal staff for the future and this could be achieved with appropriate funding that allows current staff to undertake training and study, block release, relief and backfill while on the job.
- Traineeships that combine on-the job training, study time and block release are another avenue to encourage younger Aboriginal people to work in child care.
- MACS services should be funded to allow representation on committees, working parties at local, state and national child care forums. **ABORIGINAL PEOPLE KNOW WHAT THEIR CHILDREN'S NEEDS ARE.**
- We must be included in any consultations dealing with the early childhood education, care and development of Aboriginal children.
- There is an across the board lack of understanding of the services that MACS provide. We consider our services to be "PRE-SCHOOL PLUS" because we use the same programming, developmental strategies and educational teaching methods as pre-schools but are still regarded as informal, unstructured child minders.

Positive issues

- We do have plenty of interest from our Aboriginal High School students in relation to work in our centres. However, there is a high work experience turnover in MACS (one week stints) because we cannot offer them anything beyond that.
- NSW MACS receive training through the Lady Gowrie in Sydney. They are funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services to provide ongoing staff training, workshops and conferences. This is co-ordinated by an Aboriginal NSW MACS Training Project Officer who is employed and located in the Gowrie.
- We encourage staff to gain additional skills by paying, whenever budget allows, for such courses as First Aid Certificates, a bus driving license, Sign – English course, Cook qualifications and to participate in meetings, workshops and committees.
- This child minding perception is slowly changing due to the increased representation at child care forums and meetings at state and national levels. This was partly due to SNAICC and MACS inclusion in the annual Children's Services Forum.

9.2.2 Administration

Common issues from centres

The situations listed below need urgent review by the Department of Family & Community Services because of the many changes that have evolved in the overall management of all children's early childhood services and to their staff over the years.

These changes include new and changed legislation, child protection laws and regulations, a greater awareness and acceptance of responsibility for the special needs of Indigenous children and their families. The expectations from our Aboriginal communities and wider community groups have also increased. Throw in the need to keep up with advances in technology, increased accountability needs to departments, legal requirements, quality control, financial management skills and the funding and reporting systems we must do. These all involve added work loads and extra training and support (not to mention finances).

- NSW MACS centres need funding to employ a suitably experienced or qualified full time bookkeeper/administrative assistant as an aide to the overall Administrator.
- Administrators need to be free to perform their day to day tasks that include managerial/supervisory/liaison role rather than having to spend time performing basic office duties, fee collecting, reception type functions.
- Financial management training is needed in our centres.
- We would like to have the funding to purchase necessary computers and software packages for our administration plus computers for our children to use.

- It would be useful if there were a software package that suited the MACS services nationally.
- This would mean that we could all be on the same system and this would make it easier to exchange ideas and support one another.

9.2.3 Accreditation

Common issues from centres

- Lady Gowrie is currently organizing visits to each NSW MACS to assist them in receiving training and resources around the QIAS system. This will be a first starting point in the process for most of us.
- Some of us have already been through the process and been Accredited. However, none of us were happy with the assessment criteria or the reviewers and haven't gone through the system again.
- We would like the Lady Gowrie to receive additional funding from the Department FaCS to ensure that all MACS receive support to participate equitably.
- The reviewers knew nothing about MACS and could only relate to mainstream services.
- While some of us received Accreditation there was no recognition for the broad range of services we provide. Aboriginal cultural awareness was so minute we felt that the process as it was, did not reflect or give any credit for our approach to the needs of Aboriginal children and their families.
- We want to see more Aboriginal reviewers for MACS or at least someone who has a high degree of awareness of Aboriginal culture.
- All of the above feedback in regards to QIAS was given to the National Accreditation Council and we are hopeful they will make the necessary changes.

9.2.4 Licensing and Regulations

Common issues from centres

- Our Aboriginal Administrators / Coordinators are the Managers of our MACS and as such, they are "the person in charge". This fact, we believe is not being recognized by the Licensing Body (Department of Community Services) at some centres. They quite often use the authorized Supervisor (usually the Non-Indigenous Early Childhood Teacher) as their first point of contact.
- We need to clarify this "person in charge" because at present some of our Non-Indigenous staff are also considering themselves to be in charge and this is not fair to either party. With clarification may come less confusion for everyone and the person in this correct position is then given total support from other staff members. We want to be recognized for our uniqueness and diversity and as part of that we need to be staffed and structured correctly.

- Maybe a regular meeting with our state people could help alleviate some of these issues.

9.2.5 Management Committees / Sponsors

Common issues from centres

- Most MACS in NSW have a Management Committee or a Board of Coordinators. Some are an Incorporated Organisation registered through the Aboriginal Councils & Associations Act and some come under the umbrella of a governing Co-op.
- It is imperative that members of governing committees and boards have a good understanding of what a MACS is and the overall responsibilities involved in providing the service. They need to be familiar with government regulations, licensing laws, child protection laws and legal requirements.
- Sadly, this is not always the case and conflict between Administrators, staff and Committees occurs too often. It is obvious that there is a great need for training for new committee members (not to mention present members) and that funding and licensing bodies recognize the organisational structure that is needed in running a MACS service as opposed to a mainstream service.
- Our funding should include training costs for our management committee members and any other involvement costs at centres where it is needed.

Specific centre's issues

Centre

- Due to poor management skills our centre currently has an outside Administrator looking after our centre's needs. This is proving to be very unsettling for our staff and families because we have little finances to purchase new resources that are badly needed.
- We really do need management training and support for our new management committee so that we don't go down the same track again.
- Many of our parents have poor literacy skills (no fault of their own) and therefore it makes the job of being on a management committee that little bit harder to understand. However, some training and support could help rectify this problem.
- It is very hard to get parent input into our centre and this makes the role of the manager a little bit difficult at times.

9.2.6 Block Funding

Most NSW MACS have been operating for 12-13 years and depend on funding from the main funding bodies DFCS and DOCS to continue our service. Funding to MACS has not been reviewed or changed at all and Government Departments and funding bodies are not revisiting the "extra" services we provide in our communities. We "just do it anyway" because that is what MACS are all about, providing for the holistic need of our Aboriginal children and family units in our communities.

Some of the "extra" services we provide to families are:

1. Support and follow up for families with children with "Special Needs", health, pre school screenings (explanations, paperwork, making appointments, transporting, reminders etc)
2. Parenting skills
3. Medical / Medication advice (basic from Registered Nurse)
4. Counselling and emotional support
5. Financial Budgeting advice and general family support
6. Pre-school screenings, make appointments, follow-up, liaise with health workers
7. Arrange special health checks by Aboriginal health workers, follow-up, keep records
8. High number of children with special needs e.g. behavioral, speech, hearing, social & emotional
9. Family crisis support and donations
10. Emergency placements
11. Home visits
12. Breakfast programs
13. Court attendance support
14. Transport to doctors etc
15. Accompanying child and parent to medical appointments
16. Local knowledge, referrals to other services
17. Personal references
18. Special events NAIDOC, National ATSI children's day, Sorry Day celebrations and Community activities (both - Aboriginal & Non-Aboriginal)

Common issues from centres

- Funding from DFCS & DOCS, which is paid on a monthly basis, is still the preferred method. However, **WE DO NOT WANT GST COMPONENT INCLUDED**, as we have to put that money aside and repay with BAS returns. This has caused confusion and created a problem in some centres that have misunderstood and overspent their budget.
- We want you to be aware that most of us seek extra funding from various sources but are not always successful and the amounts are never substantial. We all have at least one major fund-raising activity each year that is used

predominantly for children's resources and then staff social/personal development and picnic days (not training).

- DFCS & DOCS' staff are sympathetic to our needs but are restricted in their budget allocations while at the same time trying to be very supportive of our concerns. We consider that we are making progress in gaining recognition of our uniqueness and that Ministers, both State & Federal Commonwealth Departments are becoming more aware of what MACS services really do and how important and essential the services are to our Aboriginal children, families and community.

9.2.7 Child Care Fees

Common issues from centres

- Community Income Target has been a part of the Department FaCS funding conditions from the beginning. We feel that it is in urgent need of review. MACS try very hard to meet the CIT (Community Income Target) through fees, fundraising and donations. Avenues other than these are very limited, more so now with the introduction of the GST because if we were to come up with such ideas as sales of items, fees for services etc it would have an impact on cost, time, resources, management, financial reporting and obligations.
- Fee collecting is very frustrating, time consuming and is a big problem in most MACS services. Shortfall or losses each year can be as high as \$4,000 at a centre that only charges say a flat fee of \$5.00 a day. The cost of sending out weekly accounts, posting letters, making phone calls are impacting on our overall budgets. MACS services strive every month to meet CIT and maintain full utilization.
- We believe that our parents and carers feel pride and self esteem and therefore want to pay fees as a way of making a contribution to their child's early educational and developmental needs. As such, then we believe that too much importance and pressure is placed on MACS centres having to reach the CIT (Community Income Target).
- Individual MACS centres need to be able to use discretion (on child care fees) and treat each case separately based on family circumstances.
- Department of Family & Community Services should be flexible enough to allow for variations in quarterly releases if a significant, documented, adverse impact on budgets occurs and an increased allocation is justified.

9.2.8 Networking & Conferences

Common issues from centres

- We should also be funded to attend other Aboriginal Conferences such as Women's Issues, Management Training & Development, Youth & Family Workshops, Drug & Alcohol Seminars, local Health Department workshops and so on. Knowledge and training received is important and impacts on our holistic approach to our Indigenous children and families.

- There has been a NSW MACS delegate on the SNAICC Executive for just **one** year. We have suggested that we all take turns for a 2-year period. Thus, giving all the MACS an opportunity to contribute their skills and to enhance their knowledge of the child care industry. It is also an opportunity to gain national recognition for what we do, as well as supporting our unique services into the future.
- As a representative on the SNAICC Executive it does require extra financial assistance to cover the costs incurred as a result of maintaining contact and gathering of information for presentations at forums etc. The other cost factor is in the dispatching of feedback from SNAICC to the remainder of MACS services in NSW.
- On a state level, feedback either from the Department or to other MACS is essential and should be timed so that all relevant information is received at the same time.
- It is essential that MACS maintain a presence at all Early Childhood forums at State, National and International levels. A lack of funding restricts the number of delegates who could attend to just one person. We would prefer to have at least two delegates supported financially to attend these important events. It also gives another opportunity for someone from our Management Committee, parents or community to broaden their knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal early childhood education, care and development.
- NSW MACS would like to have an annual National MACS meeting. Participation should be opened to all relevant service providers, funding bodies and Government agencies. This meeting should be organized through SNAICC in Victoria and in consultation with all MACS state representatives.
- SNAICC should remain the peak body to represent MACS at all levels and forums. There should also be SNAICC representation on all National Early Childhood Advisory Councils that advise Ministers on policies and strategies etc.

Positive issue from centres

- NSW MACS do get an opportunity to meet at an annual Training Week funded by Department FaCS. Each MACS has a turn at being the host venue. Agendas are a bit formal and tend to lean towards Management and Financial Management Issues. General consensus from our NSW MACS is that we meet more often to discuss issues and concerns, exchange information and generally network with each other.

9.2.9 Service Delivery

Common issues from centres

- Aboriginal children have "Priority of Access" in MACS services and we will not deny any Aboriginal child an opportunity to receive good quality care and an early education. They deserve to receive this care in a safe, loving, and culturally appropriate setting that includes their parents, families, friends and community.
- Most NSW MACS take non-Aboriginal children and this is consistent with advancement to the future and the reconciliation process. Also there are more mixed families and extended family circumstances to consider.
- We want our children to be given the best possible happy and healthy start in life and see our role as preparing them for their future in a way that past generations were denied.
- The issue of non-payment of fees and erratic attendances can affect the centre meeting its obligations in regards to the CIT. Because culturally, we are a race of people who tend to be on the move a lot we want to be flexible in keeping places available in the centre for these families in our communities. However, issues do arise where for personal reasons families do not pay their fees and in some circumstance don't notify us that they are not returning. This obviously means a cost to our centre. This impacts on the term "usage" or "utilization" as defined by funding bodies, as opposed to mainstream services that do not experience the same fluctuations as MACS. This again is another reason for MACS funding to be reviewed and allocated on a "places" basis irrespective of attendances.
- MACS should not be regarded as a mainstream service but one that serves to foster to the real needs of Aboriginal children's early developmental needs. We want to make sure our children are given the best care and education possible.
- Commonwealth Departments should be made aware that MACS provide the full gamut of child care, health, education, nutrition, development and social family support, based on the holistic needs of children aged 0-5 years.
- We would like to have a better understanding and working relationship with our licensing body in relation to who is in charge of our services. **Please see section Licensing and Regulations.**
- We would like to have an Indigenous Resource and Advisory Agency who could work with our MACS here in NSW.
- As previously noted there is an urgent need for a nationally consistent view of MACS and the part they play in servicing Aboriginal communities. We have been around for quite a while and despite restricted funding we manage to provide a real service (to the best of our abilities and finances) that actually meets the needs of our Aboriginal children and families.
- We provide a valuable service for Aboriginal children and families that includes long day care, early education, pre-school education, care, health, nutrition and development. Yet we are seen to be different from State funded Pre-Schools.

Positive issues:

- There is a great deal of interaction with other related agencies such as Family Support Group, Aboriginal Health Units, Dieticians, NSW Deaf & Blind Society, Primary Schools (School Transition programs), Special Needs professionals, Early Intervention through Department of Education and local health therapists, Women's Refuge.
- We do meet in our state on a regular basis with other MACS services and this we hope will continue to happen in the future.

9.2.10 Commonwealth Department report on NSW MACS

In NSW the department funds all of the MACS services. Three of the services are located in the Sydney metropolitan area. The remainders are in rural areas with most located in large regional towns.

The State Department of Community Services licenses the services. All care for children aged 0-5 and operate Monday to Friday. The majorities are licensed to care for between 32 and 40 children per day, with the exceptions being the service at Wreck Bay (15 places) and Murawina Mt. Druitt (60 places).

Initially the services may have provided children's services other than caring for 0-5 year olds but over time these services have discontinued probably because of lack of finances.

All the services receive special services funding as well as operational subsidy and child care assistance funds. The special services funding for NSW services varies greatly from one service to another and seems to have been determined based on the service's initial application for funding.

Special services funds are generally used to fund the position of the coordinator and the bus driver and other costs associated with the running of the vehicle. Each MACS has a vehicle (about 20-seater bus), which is used to pick up and drop off children attending the service. The buses are usually replaced every few years by the department.

Operational subsidy and special services funding provided to the MACS have increased by small amounts over the last few years. Funds for child care assistance have increased considerably from 1 July 2000. This is as a result of the introduction of CCB from that date and the increase per place in funding from about \$96 per week to \$122 per week.

All services in NSW charge fees and make efforts to collect these from parents. The amounts charged are generally close to the \$5 per day. Some services will use a sliding scale and charge parents with higher incomes a higher fee for care.

MACS Training Support Service

The department funds a training support service for MACS centres.

The service is presently sponsored by Lady Gowrie and receives slightly more than \$100,000 per annum in funding. Lady Gowrie employs a worker who provides training and support directly to the MACS services and engages consultants to provide other training.

Training provided is directed at all levels in the MACS services from management committee members through to child care workers.

Aboriginal Playgroup

There are 8 Aboriginal playgroups approved in NSW.

The playgroups receive between \$25,000 and \$35,000 per annum in funding. The sponsor will normally employ one worker to coordinate and run the playgroup. The services are free to operate the hours and the days that the funding will allow.

Most operate a few hours per day and for a few days per week.

At some of the playgroups the mothers will stay with the children, but for others the mothers will not as they are enrolled in TAFE or employed in a CDEP scheme.

The services however are very fragile. The small amount of funding makes it difficult for the services to operate for many hours per week. Also the service can cease to operate for periods if the coordinator becomes ill, resigns or leaves town.

Of the 8 that are approved in NSW, 6 only are currently operating.

The playgroups at Bowraville and Dareton are not currently operating.

Long Day Care Centres

The department provides funding to a long day care centre that is managed by Aboriginal people.

Murawina Redfern is located at Redfern and provides a long day care service. They are licensed for 48 places. Many years ago they chose not to become a MACS and therefore transfer to the MACS funding. They are funded with operational subsidy and specials services funding. They receive about \$246,000 per annum. They have been approved by the delegate to continue receiving operational subsidy because of their status as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service.

Outside School Hours Care Services

There are four outside school hours care services that specifically care for Aboriginal children.

All four are located in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Two are located in the Redfern area, one in the Woolloomooloo area and the other out near Liverpool.

These services also have been approved to receive additional operational subsidy funding.

Mobile Services

The department funds a number of mobile services in NSW.

Some mobiles conduct playgroup sessions for Aboriginal communities in remote and rural parts of NSW.

Walgett mobile is sponsored by the Walgett Aboriginal Medical service and conducts playgroup sessions in the Walgett area mainly for Aboriginal communities.

9.3 Recommendations

1. We want it recognized our Aboriginal Administrators / Coordinators are the Managers of our MACS and as such, they are "the person in charge". This fact, we believe is not being recognized by the Licensing Body (Department of Community Services) at some centres. They quite often use the authorized Supervisor (usually the Non-Indigenous Early Childhood Teacher) as their first point of contact.
2. We need the above recommendation adhered to and clarified to the appropriate bodies as confusion over who really is in the correct position is causing undue stress and conflict for everyone involved. We want to be recognized for our uniqueness and diversity and as part of that we need to be staffed and structured correctly.
3. We need funding to hire good qualified staff who can do the administration and bookkeeping for our child care centres.
4. We have a national MACS meeting at least once every two years. This could also include the Commonwealth staff running a national get together for the project staff who work with the Indigenous services. They could run side by side but meet at the end to discuss common issues.
5. To have a national SNAICC Conference where we discuss issues from the MACS at a national level.
6. We would like to have a national listing of all the MACS Centres and their contact details made available to us all.
7. We would like some form of support and training for our Coordinators of our MACS centres. Maybe a mentoring program is what we really need here in NSW.
8. Most NSW MACS services have outgrown their original buildings and we really do need larger facilities or more space for our children. Storage space for our resources is becoming an urgent priority.
9. Pre-school and school transitional programs are hindered by 3-5 year old children being in the same room due to lack of space.
10. NSW MACS have requested a common Policy Manual that can be adapted to meet the cultural needs and suit local conditions. This project would require special funding for a working group to complete.
11. We want a Resource manual developed to cover the Roles & Responsibilities of Staff and Management Committees in MACS. However, this manual would have to be developed after consultation with all parties involved. This means both the funding body and the licensing bodies meet and discuss with the MACS staff any concerns and issues they may have. This recommendation could be facilitated by SNAICC.

12. We also want our training needs looked at and made available to us. Such training should include Staff Recruitment & Selection, Staff Appraisal Training for Administrators and Committees etc.
13. The fact that our budgets are remaining static but our expenses and costs are increasing is causing some concerns. We recommend that our budgets in NSW be reviewed.
14. Our Centres need to keep up with new technology and therefore training in technology is a must for our Administrators. The need to purchase these resources and to have a software package that is suitable to our MACS is essential. If and when we do acquire these then it will make our networking and financial administration issues less of a burden.
15. We would also like to be funded to purchase some of these computers for our children to use as a teaching resource.
16. We recommend that there be consistency in the interpretation of our regulations and policies across our state by DOCS (Children's Services Advisers for MACS) especially for license renewals and "Risk Assessment".
17. Resource aids for teaching Cultural Awareness in the year 2001. We need these resources to raise the awareness of our children's heritage and make them strong culturally. We do have community members who do volunteer to come along to the centre and tell some stories but quite often we don't have enough people to do this important task of building up our children's self esteem.
18. Accreditation needs to remain voluntary and also some of the principles need to be more culturally appropriate before we participate.
19. MACS should be fully funded on the basis of licensed places and not on usage.

9.4 Other Support Agencies

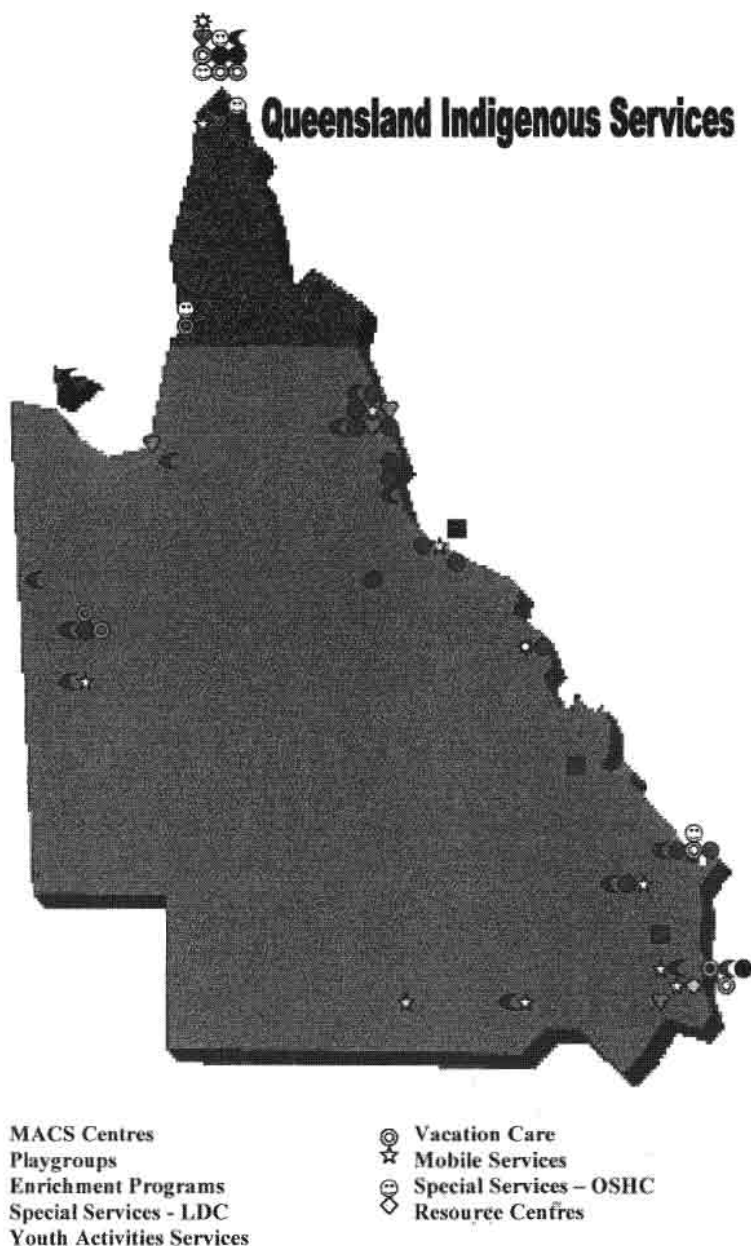
Lady Gowrie in Sydney is currently contracted by Department FaCS to provide a Resource & Training service for all NSW MACS Services until 30th June 2003 and then this will be reviewed.

They employ an Aboriginal MACS Project Officer who coordinates training, "In Services" and state meetings. As long time established centres MACS now have access to resources on a loan basis. The Gowrie are also available for advice and assistance as required.

This arrangement is satisfactory for the time being, however, it would be good to know what is happening in other states as our ultimate aim is to allocate our Resource and Training to an Indigenous Provider.

Some of our MACS subscribe to the NSW Employers Association mainly for industrial and legal (mainly wages) services. However, we find their training courses very costly.

10 Queensland



10.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Queensland has an Indigenous population of approximately 104,817 people (according to the ABS statistics).

There are 3 MACS services in Queensland.

Gundoo Day Care Centre

Postal:
C/- Post Office
Cherbourg Queensland 4605

Location:
Fisher Street
Cherbourg Queensland 4605

Ph: 07 4168-2832
Fax: 07 4168 3349

Licensed for 60 places
Funded for 45 places

Undoonoo Child Care Centre

Postal:
Post Office
Woorabinda Queensland 4702

Location:
17 Carbine Street
Woorabinda Queensland 4702

Ph: 07 4935-0107
Fax: 07 4935 0212

Licensed for 62 places
Funded for 44 places

Gooddo Day Care Centre

Postal:
C/- Post Office
Palm Island Queensland 4816

Location: Park Road
Palm Island Queensland 4816

Ph: 07 4770-1182
Fax: 07 4770-1182

Licensed for 44 places
Funded for 44 places



10.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. Therefore, under each section there may be a difference of opinion on some issues.

10.2.1 Training and Staffing

Common issues from centres

- Not enough qualified Indigenous workers and training is an issue. We have difficulty in attracting qualified staff. Generally we do not have trouble in attracting staff in general, but at times find it difficult attracting local Indigenous staff.
- Because we believe it is better for our children to have local Indigenous staff we always encourage them to apply for positions at the centre. Of the non-Indigenous staff working at our centre all of them have Indigenous partners or are accepted by the Indigenous community in which they work.
- Because of the isolation of some of our MACS it makes it doubly hard to attract staff in general let alone qualified staff.
- Traineeships is one means of helping get our people trained and one of the MACS centres is fortunate enough to have a TAFE College nearby in the community. However, for the others travel is an issue and so is the fact that trainees work through the local TAFE but for other staff they have to study through Open Learning Institute in their own time. It is very difficult getting staff trained in this manner. Made more difficult if TAFE facilities are not close to the community.
- Funding to get our people trained is an issue and also the way in which they get trained is not appropriate for them because we want something that encompasses on the job training for all staff.
- Resources to help with training is another issue because we only have a small staff resource library and with no funding to expand it over the last two years it is a big issue.
- Coordinators also need training in becoming a Coordinator/Manager of a centre. Maybe some form of a mentoring program is what Indigenous people really need.
- Most of our MACS use CDEP participants in their centres and this seems to be a great support. However, issues can arise around who they are responsible to and why. This is unclear in some communities and may be an issue for other services.
- Policy writing (which should include cultural understanding) and implementation need to be looked at as another issue for our centres. Many need assistance in the writing of policies and the understanding of them.
- All types of in-service training is needed and if it's not possible to have it on site then funding needs to be available for staff to meet the costs of travel. Culturally and financially it is very hard for many of our staff to leave their

families and travel away for blocks of time. Therefore, on site training is our preferred choice.

- Traineeships seem to be a success for our centres, however they are generally only for 12 months and then they are left to their own devices to try and finish their training in child care. This issue needs to be looked at on a national level.
- Behaviour Management training is an important professional training component we must have.

10.2.2 Administration

Specific centre's issues

Centre

- For our centre the administration side of things is OK. We have trained staff with the appropriate computer software.
- We use MYOB and some other services use Excel and therefore there seems no consistency for MACS. Makes it hard to give and receive support between centres (particularly admin support).
- As a result of all of the above happening well we don't tend to lose our staff at all and in fact we have only experienced small changes in staff numbers over the last six years. This certainly makes a big difference in providing quality care and good administration support to the Indigenous children of our community.

Centre

- We really do need a computer and software to suit our administration needs. As well as an updated computer we also need training for our clerks and staff so that in an event of losing a staff member someone else could just take over.
- Training in computer technology is a big issue for us.
- We do have a large turnover in Managers solely because of the above issues.
- When we are sponsored by an independent Aboriginal Council our administration is taken over by them. If the system is good then problems may not arise other than our staff don't necessarily get a good understanding and training of their own budgets etc. We become too dependent on them for financial assistance. On the other hand, if administration is lacking then this too is a big problem for the successful operation of our centre.

10.2.3 Accreditation

Specific centre's issues

Centre

- We have been a MACS centre that's participated in this process several times and each time we have got better at it. However, initially it was very hard and seemed a lot of work but because we were given a lot of professional support from our Coordinator and also from the Gowrie in Brisbane we managed to get through the process. We now feel more comfortable with QIAS. The other thing to be aware of is that when we went through the QIAS process we had a 5 years span where we experienced stable staff numbers both qualified and unqualified.
- Would have been great if we could have had the funding to visit another MACS service that have been through the process and they could have been a great support to us. Indigenous people learn better by seeing and communicating.

Centre

- We have not even begun the process of Accreditation and feel that we would need a lot of assistance to firstly understand it and then attempt to have a go.
- We would have to overcome difficulties such as high turnover in staff, understanding and support from our management group, travel consideration to gain training and resources and the need for ongoing financial and human resources to meet the challenge of QIAS.
- Would really like the support of another MACS to lead us through the process.
- We sometimes don't feel comfortable enough to use the Gowrie as their first point of call for assistance.

10.2.4 Licensing and Regulations

Common issues from centres

- We have a fairly comfortable relationship with our licensing and regulation staff
- We would like however, to see them have some cultural awareness training and understanding.

10.2.5 Management Committees

Specific centre's issues

Centre

- We believe that we are very fortunate to have an excellent Management Committee who are very positive and are involved in meeting the present and future needs of our community centre. We have regular monthly meetings at a

time that suits our members and our members are a good balance of parents and business representatives from our community.

- Our committee is very supportive of our centre and this shows in the fact that our numbers and utilization has gone from a 44 place centre to a 60 place centre in just over 5 years.
- Our committee works in consultation with the Coordinator who manages the daily operation of the centre. It is a harmonious relationship that has resulted in our centre being one that our community is really proud of.

Centre

- We are in a predicament at the moment in which we do not have a management committee at all. At present the role of our management is being conducted by our local Community Council. This is causing a few hiccups in the day to day running of the centre. The Coordinator has to get approval from their council before making certain decisions or just to purchase resources. The issue could be that the local council may not be aware that they could delegate certain responsibilities and duties to the Coordinator or that they feel it is something that they must take responsibility for. Whichever way, it is not working very well.
- Another issue is that representation of these committees or councils is very limited and not as it should be therefore issues such as not being able to hold an AGM meeting due to lack of a quorum is a regular annual event.
- There is a lack of understanding between board/management and the Manager/Coordinator of the centre. The Coordinator therefore feels frustrated and not in control of the daily operations most of the time.
- One of the biggest issues is the lack of commitment and support to the monthly meetings of the child care centre. Add to this a limited knowledge and understanding of child care (by today's standards) and lack of skills in the financial running of a business generally could and does mean problems keep happening from time to time.
- Many of the above issues then seem to affect staff morale and team work (not to mention stress for the Coordinator). This may result in high turnover in staff numbers.
- Support, understanding, resources and training for management committees and sponsor bodies could help alleviate some of these issues.

10.2.6 Funding for our MACS

Common issues from centres

- We would like the block funding to continue in our state.
- We should be block funded for Child Care Benefit and Operational Subsidy for the number of licensed places at that centre, rather than the utilization.
- The three centres in Queensland would like the overall funding for MACS increased to cover the original role of MACS.

- MACS centres should be funded to provide a standard of high quality care because that is what our children deserve. A set of standards is necessary to meet the requirements for the National Accreditation process.
- Would like to have some training in relation to submission writing as we believe it is a necessary skill to have.

Positive Issues

- All three MACS in Queensland have successfully applied for and received additional capital funding from other sources e.g.:
 1. Woorabinda and Cherbourg – from the National Child Care Strategy
 2. Palm Island and Cherbourg – from the Queensland Government Infrastructure Grants
 3. Cherbourg – from the Gaming Control Board
- Our relationship is very good with our funding body in Queensland. All project Officers and their executives are very helpful and understanding of our needs.

10.2.7 Child Care Fees

Common issues from centres

- A major issue is the collecting of fees for child care. We try to keep the cost of care to a workable amount but even this is proving difficult to meet. Many of our community members cannot afford to pay child care costs when they are in the bracket of low incomes or no incomes, costs of daily living, rents, petrol prices, large families and also the many social problems faced by our Indigenous people.
- Many of our services depend on fund raising and rent collection from the hiring of buildings and the use of their buses to try and meet their community income targets.

10.2.8 Networking and Conferences

Common issues from centres

- Our MACS centres do participate in state conferences, but we don't have ongoing funding for this to continue happening. We also have our own MACS Forums.
- However, not enough networking is happening between the MACS in our state and also nationally. We are a unique group of services and therefore we believe an ideal situation should be that we here in Queensland should meet on a state basis at least twice a year and on a national level at least once a year or every two years if possible.

- If a meeting is not possible then at the very least maybe a teleconference is possible on a regular basis. Both need to be funded.
- The MACS and the Commonwealth Department of Family & Community Services should have a closer working relationship with us on a national level and also closer links should be made with the Federal Minister. This should be funded separately.
- We have a representative on the SNAICC Executive and we see their organisation as an important form of support to our MACS nationally.
- We would also like them (SNAICC) to support us in organising a national MACS Conference in the Year 2001.

10.2.9 Service Delivery

Common issues from centres

- Our biggest issue is the lack of recurrent special services (MACS) funding for mainstream places in MACS Centres. One centre has 16 mainstream places and find it very difficult providing those extras that the MACS centres should and were set up to provide. These extras include:
 1. Providing high quality meals three times daily.
 2. Provision of hats and sunscreen as part of our sun protection policy.
 3. Washing children's sheets, blankets and hats weekly.
 4. Extra staff to cater for the special needs of our children.
 5. Desperate for in-service training for our unqualified staff.
 6. Due to the high health needs of our children in the community we need extra funding to meet those needs.
 7. Many of our families cannot afford the resources for their children at home so we try and provide it at the centre while they are here. Therefore, extra funding is needed to compensate for what we see as a community need.
 8. Our parents need extra support and training in all areas (we could run programs in our centre to meet these needs if we had the funding).
 9. Our Indigenous culture is very important to our children, parents and community and we believe our centre is a great place to teach our unique culture. This does cost money and therefore is another issue for our budget to cover.
 10. A funded vehicle is very important in the running of a MACS centre as we quite often have the need to transport either sick or late children to and from the centre because parents just can't provide this service themselves. Finding another relative or guardian to have a child is also another issue and may cost more in the effort to drive around and find someone.
 11. The three MACS centres in Queensland are very happy with the amount of time and professional support they do get from the

health services. The health team visits each of the centres on a regular basis. Health is a must for our Indigenous people.

All of the above are issues that we face and because MACS centres have seen very little increase in special services funding over the last decade, at a time when we have had to provide the highest quality of care for our children. Centres are no longer child minding facilities but a place where we provide a holistic approach to education and child development. In order to meet these needs, (which include a whole heap of social issues) we feel we must be given ample funding to meet the well documented challenges that Indigenous people face in Australia today.

Governments need to spend the appropriate amounts of money that are desperately needed so that our children's start is a positive one and is much more beneficial than spending it much later on in youth detention centres across this country.

10.2.10 Resource & Advisory Agencies

Common issues from centres

- For this state we get support from QCOSS who are our Resource & Advisory Agency based in Townsville. See details about this service further on in this report.
- We are also able to obtain Industrial and Management support from CSEAQ.
- Both of the above agencies provide us with good support and resources.
- We believe that funding needs to be provided to the agencies that are already operating so they could be expanded to meet the needs of all the Indigenous early childhood services in Australia. We believe that at present some other states don't even have a resource and advisory agency that could give much needed support.

10.3 Recommendations

1. The amount of funding for MACS nationally should be increased to meet the changing needs of the services we know we must provide.
2. We have a national MACS meeting at least once every two years. This could also include the Commonwealth staff running a national get together for the project staff who work with the Indigenous services. They could run side by side but meet at the end to discuss common issues.
3. Each state and territory have at least a state meeting or conference at least once a year.
4. The QIAS system remains voluntary but all MACS centres have a go at going through the process. Plus support and resources should be made available to us.
5. We need to make sure we have an Indigenous voice on the National Accreditation Council.
6. We need more Indigenous people as reviewers, moderators and a voice on the National Accreditation Council.
7. Funding to be made available so that centres can visit other services that have gone through the accreditation process and gain valuable knowledge and assistance.
8. Training is a major issue for our services and therefore we need to seriously come up with a national funded system to change the number of people accessing training, promote child care as career path, make the training more culturally relevant, support the people who are in training with better resources and information.
9. Look at the traineeships that are available and come up with some extra funding to support those trainees to complete their full certificates in early child care.
10. Mentoring should be real option for our many Coordinators around the country who need assistance in becoming a manager or a Coordinator of a service. Too many of our Coordinators/Managers are becoming burnt out or are not given any training in becoming a Manager of a child care centre. This is very evident in the number of Indigenous Coordinators around who have stated that they would have liked more support and on site training when they were new to the job.
11. In regards to administration, we would like a computer and software package that suits our MACS and also training made available as well. For some centres, they would also need an administration person on staff. This major recommendation is very important and needs to be funded.
12. SNAICC to be a national voice for all our Indigenous services not just the MACS.

13. A national representative body drawn up to look at block funding, fee structures, child care benefits, resources, training etc. and to follow up with discussion, make changes and inform the appropriate people.
14. Cultural awareness training and programming be a must for all centres. Maybe a national resource agency can be funded to help with this.
15. Management training and resources should be funded nationally to support those Indigenous communities, management committees, sponsor groups, Indigenous corporations etc. who may need training and resources to assist them in running a child care centre such as a MACS.
16. Training in submission writing is proving to be a necessity in this day and age where we are in the open market seeking outside funding to keep our centres going.
17. Child care fees and utilization needs to be looked into further on a national level.

10.4 Other Support Services in Queensland

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNIT

The Indigenous Children's Services Unit is a Queensland State Wide Resource and Training Agency sponsored by Queensland Council of Social Service Inc. and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. ICSU is based within the Department of Family and Community Services in Townsville.

The unit provides support, advice, training, resources and referrals for Commonwealth funded Indigenous Services throughout Queensland. Services range from remote island playgroups in the Torres Strait to large Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services in rural and remote areas. Currently the unit services approximately 80 such services in Queensland. Help is also available to mainstream children's services in providing culturally appropriate and inclusive programs. The unit supports the Supplementary children's programs in Queensland in this respect.

Regular 'face to face' service visits and newsletters are combined with information packs and a library loan service to assist services in meeting the needs of children's services to include Aboriginal, Torres Strait and South Sea Islander children into their programs. Workshop and informal training is provided as well as telephone support.

For more information contact
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Or

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11 Tasmania

Tasmanian Indigenous Services



11.1 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Tasmania has an Indigenous population of approximately 15,322 people (according to the ABS statistics).

There is one MACS service in Tasmania and it is located in a suburb of Hobart.

Aboriginal Children's Centre
7a Emily Road
West Moonah
Tasmania 7009

Phone: 03 6272 7099

Fax: 03 6273 0869

Licensed for 27 places

As the only MACS in Tasmania we believe that our statement below is very appropriate

“Together – for our children”

“So many issues – so little time”

We are a MACS service in the suburb of Moonah in Hobart and we have a steady utilization of approximately 22 – 25 children. As well as a Long Day Care we run an Outside School Hours Care Program. Our sponsor body is the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc. We have listed our issues and recommendations below:

11.2 Issues

Please be aware that all MACS centres are not always going to have the same opinions and issues as another. However, in this state there is only one MACS centre.

11.2.1 Training and Staffing

- Coordinator/staff training is the major issue we have because of lack of funding.
- Employment of qualified and unqualified staff has been less of a problem this year (pure luck in getting the appropriate people, but we can see it becoming more of an issue in the future).
- Would like to see our Indigenous staff who are not qualified be more "recognised" for the skills that they already have (**this is a real issue for us**).

11.2.2 Administration

- We would like more administration time to support the Coordinator.
- Would prefer to have enough funding to pay an administration/receptionist but we can't afford it therefore there are more office, administration and receptionist demands on the Coordinator.

11.2.3 Accreditation

- The QIAS system needs to be more culturally appropriate to suit our MACS centres.
- We believe that this process should be part of licensing rather than another complete separate body.

11.2.4 Licensing and Regulations

- Currently our state is going through a big review of the "Child Care Bill 2000".
- This has "big brother" connotations and moves little towards recognition of child care and self-determination for Indigenous people.

11.2.5 Management Committee

- We have an excellent working relationship with our sponsor body TAC (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre Inc.)

11.2.6 Funding for our MACS

- The block funding is great but the amount continues to be an issue for us and we have continually written to the funding body requesting more funding without success.

11.2.7 Child Care Fees

- Would like to see more scope given to the number of children needing respite care and family support places and obviously the payment to match. In most cases these families need financial assistance and therefore fees are a big issue.

11.2.8 Networking and Conferencing

- Because we are a one off service we find networking and sharing ideas with other MACS is virtually non-existent. We have been trying since the early 90's to have a national meeting, training and / or conference. If successful we would like them to be bi-annually (every 2 years).
- Would like to support someone from our service to be on the SNAICC National Executive.
- We would strongly support a nationally consistent view of the MACS and for any reviews to be done that they be national.

11.2.9 Service Delivery

- It would make our evaluations a lot easier for us if we all get back to the original purpose of the “Multifunctional Aboriginal Services” and that was to provide a range of support services that catered for our Aboriginal children and families of our communities. For example the funding restrictions for our “Early Start Programs” have meant our “multi-functional” aspect has become “**just functional**” and stretches both the human and physical resources. If you have passionate staff its not so bad but we aren't always going to have them therefore things need to change.
- Would like to see more scope given to the number of children needing respite care and family support places and obviously the payment to match. In most cases these families need financial assistance and therefore fees are a big issue.

- We have a real demand for more child care places particularly in the age group of school aged children.
- We have a waiting list and because of our family situations we need more places for emergency care and respite care.
- We believe that there is a real need for care in other areas of Tasmania as one service is not sufficient.
- As the only Indigenous early childhood service we need a lot of support, advice and resources that are not available to us at present (not withstanding all the good support we receive from TAC). The types of assistance we need are from the following areas:
 1. Family support services
 2. Parenting Programs
 3. Educational/Health Programs (children)
 4. Outreach playgroups/mobile support groups
 5. Recognition from the Commonwealth that we need more Indigenous workers and that to have them trained we need more funding
 6. Our building and physical space is insufficient
 7. A lot more flexibility around the funding for our transport needs.

11.3 Recommendations

1. We must not lose sight of our visions for the MACS and that must be our priority. Therefore we must receive appropriate funding to suit not just running a child care service but be aware that realistically we are supporting a holistic, culturally appropriate multi-service centre. We try and cater for health needs and many other issues facing our Indigenous families and children by trying to keep up with an ever-changing community need and demands. We traditionally and culturally are a supportive community and we know the importance of supporting our children's early years and therefore the MACS should be funded sufficiently to meet those needs.
2. We would like the Commonwealth to seriously look at setting up another service in Tasmania.
3. Would like a consistent and easily understood Child Care Benefit system that suits all the MACS nationally.
4. We recommend a national meeting of all MACS every 2 years.
5. Because we are the only one in Tasmania we would like to have funding to meet with other services in another state. Where we could discuss issues and have some training and support in several important areas e.g.: transport costs, recognition of Indigenous workers, parenting programs, health programs, outreach playgroups, lack of physical space, discuss the national accreditation system and how it may or may not benefit an Indigenous service etc.
6. We want some form of funding to look at ways of getting more Indigenous qualified staff. This would mean our staff would be trained together and therefore could support one another. All staff could seek training at different levels if we could afford it.
7. Would like an Indigenous Resource & Advisory Agency that could support our centre.
8. Would like a national consistent administration set-up that includes a computer and a suitable software package that meets the needs of a MACS service. This would also include training and staff to look after this area.
9. Would like SNAICC to be one of our main voices to support our recommendations.

12 MACS services in context

MACS services in context

Many of the MACS issues written about in this report are a direct result of some of our well-documented facts of Indigenous health and welfare issues nationally. Throw in a little bit of our history on education, language and culture and you may well see a better picture of what our MACS services know and deal with everyday.

However, our people also know that our Indigenous early child care services such as the MACS nationally do make a difference to the future needs of our children. For example, while recognizing and acknowledging that Aboriginal groups throughout Australia are not all the same they do share some common areas across the board including early education and care of our children.

There is a strong commitment by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advancing their educational outcomes. Indigenous communities recognise that education can improve their economic and social well-being.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have achieved many positive educational outcomes over the last few decades. Today, there are Indigenous judges, magistrates, lawyers, politicians, accountants, educators, university graduates and post-graduates in many disciplines.

This has been the result of greater commitments by Governments towards Indigenous education, and especially, tremendous efforts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in overcoming their disadvantages and many barriers to get to this level.

However, there is still a lot to be done. Participation in education by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is still very low at all educational levels, in absolute terms, as well as in comparison with other Australians. The levels of literacy and numeracy are not adequate to equip many of them for the labour market. There is very limited involvement by parents and communities in the education of their children, at all levels, due to the lack of education of the parents themselves. A lack of exposure to a learning culture from early childhood also hinders the learning progress in later life.⁴

MACS were originally set up to meet the needs of our Indigenous communities and most importantly help our children from an early age to get into a learning culture that was suitable to Indigenous children. From looking at the maps in this report we can see that for most of them they were set up in the rural, remote and urban areas of Australia that have rather a large population of Indigenous families. There are also other Indigenous early childhood services that have gone up as well as MACS e.g. Playgroups, youth groups, family day care, integrated services (combination of a pre-

⁴ Submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Rural & Remote Education in Australia from The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. November 1999, page 4

schools one section of the building and a long day care the other section) creches, special services, mobile services, occasional care etc. Not forgetting, there are also the mainstream services that our Indigenous families also access. Staff in these services can see how much their good work can, and does, make a difference to the education of our children. This last statement is best summed up in:

Aboriginal children learn from their families. They learn about values, they learn their place within the family and within their people's structure – their belonging. The family helps the child to be strong in the Aboriginal way – to know who they are, where they fit, and what is expected of them. Families pass on their knowledge, to ensure that it goes on throughout the generations. Children learn to listen to their family and to know their links. They learn about caring and sharing, acceptance and respect, acknowledgement and responsibility. They learn that caring and sharing comes through having the time, the knowledge and the patience for life.

Family networks play a huge role in any child's development regardless of cultural background. For those of our people who have had to endure forced separations from family, the role of the family in cultural learning assumes a special importance.

Extensive family networks are often to be found amongst our people. In an extended family grouping there are many different 'types' of Aboriginal groups, all with their own ways, values and beliefs. Even children from mixed race relationships have the added influence of the non-Aboriginal parent thus adding to the sophisticated tapestry of the kinship network they are part of.

Even though some child care services, schools, colleges and universities are increasingly sharing in the responsibility of cultural education through their curriculum, to be effective this has to be done in collaboration with families.⁵

One of the most important points in the above statement that statistical information backs up is the one whereby many of our Indigenous children today do have one parent who is non-Indigenous. The Australian Bureau of Statistics says that nearly 60% of Indigenous children who live in couple families had only one Indigenous parent (Ross 1999 page 142-43).

There is also a written report⁶ (from South Australia) that has looked into why our Aboriginal families use early childhood education services, and why they don't. This report is very interesting because it confirms that many of the issues in South Australia are the same as those described in this report.

Although a couple of our services in this report did touch on some of the community issues that have impacted on their service many verbally talked about them but

⁵ Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara Women's Council 1991 *From the Flat Earth*, published by the Children's Services Resource & Advisory Program (Northern Region) 1995 page 14

⁶ Strategic Results Project Report – *Why Aboriginal people use early childhood education services, and why they don't*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

neglected to write them down in detail. However, there is enough written material published that talks in detail about Indigenous social issues.

Such factors as poverty, poor housing, health, domestic violence and unemployment etc adversely affect educational outcomes.

This suggests a deep and systemic problem that requires a concerted approach by governments, communities and education providers. Unless the problems are addressed collectively, efforts to achieve sustainable improvements in education outcomes for Indigenous Australians will be ineffective. The scope of the shortcomings also suggests that a holistic approach is needed to address and remove the barriers identified in this report.

There have been instances where some human rights principles and requirements of State Education Acts have not been complied with. The low literacy level and poor attendance appear to breach the State Education Acts and various articles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially those articulating the right of every child to education and protection against discrimination.⁷

Another well documented area is Indigenous Health. In the 1995 Health Survey, just over one quarter of Indigenous women and men, in non-remote areas, reported having poor or fair health. Indigenous people were about twice as likely to report poor or fair health than non-Indigenous people (ABS 1999 pp4, 15).

Australia's Health 2000, by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, shows life expectancy for Aboriginal Australians is at levels not experienced in the rest of the population for 100 years.

Health continues to be a major issue for Indigenous people into the year 2000 and for our MACS centres they continue to be a major part of our community efforts to help look after our children's health needs. They do this in co-operation with our Indigenous health services nationally.

As part of our overall health issues substance abuse is a very real and immediate problem that affects many of our communities. I have included in the Appendix C a copy of a submission to the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs Inquiry into Substance Abuse in Australian Communities. This submission was from the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (SA) Inc. and they have kindly allowed us to include it in this report. This section was to help give a brief outline of the many disadvantage areas our people still live, work and try to survive in.

⁷ *Submission to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Rural & Remote Education in Australia* from The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. November 1999, page 5

13 Summary

This is the first time since 1992⁸ that feedback has been sought from all of the services nationally, providing a 'snapshot' of MACS in the year 2000.

What is most striking about the responses is the commitment to meeting the needs of the children, despite the hardships and stresses reported by many of the Coordinators.

The issues raised in this report can be summarised under four broad headings, staffing and training, QIAS and cultural issues, isolation, and finance and administration issues.

13.1 Staffing and Training Issues

There is a national shortage of qualified Indigenous staff, in urban, rural and remote areas. Coordinators are experiencing difficulty in meeting licensing standards because they cannot replace qualified staff when they have days off or leave.

Attaining qualifications can require several years of attending lectures and completing assignments, and/or going through a complex process for Recognition of Current Competencies. Traditionally, child care is women's business. In communities where education (and child care) is not given high priority, there is likely to be little support available for women seeking to achieve a qualification while meeting other family commitments and perhaps working as well.

The cost of training is also a barrier, particularly for those potential students or trainees living in remote areas, but also for those closer to training resources but living on low incomes.

Training programs that fail to take account of cultural issues do not attract Indigenous students. Innovative training strategies such as those put into place in Victoria may go some way to resolving the shortage of qualified staff, but the process is slow. Experience in other States has shown that it is difficult to keep good staff in low paid, low status child care jobs when there are opportunities in other areas such as tourism.

Many Coordinators appear to have limited access to management and leadership training or support (such as mentoring support). Considering the isolation reported by a significant number of Coordinators, it is likely that they are learning the skills of staff management and leadership by trial and error, often in circumstances where staff may have relations on the governing Council, or the Coordinator has other community or family obligations which affect her relationships with staff.

⁸ Consultations were held with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities on their needs for children's services in 1993. The consultations were funded by the then Children's Services Administration and Development, Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services. See Appendix A.

The South Australian experience suggests that the most effective management and leadership training for Indigenous managers occurs through mentoring and through opportunities for Coordinators to learn from each other by meeting regularly and experiencing training together.

13.2 QIAS and Cultural Issues

A significant number of respondents raised concerns that the current system of Accreditation does not take account of cultural issues. Attention was drawn to the lack of Indigenous reviewers, moderators and representatives on the NCAC. Although there was interest expressed in using some aspects of QIAS as benchmarks or as stepping-stones to improve quality of care, some centres that had achieved Accreditation were not prepared to go through the process again.

Any strategies for quality improvement would have to take into consideration the shortage of qualified Indigenous staff, the barriers to training, the cycle of disadvantage in many Aboriginal communities with outcomes such as low literacy levels, the low priority given to child care by some Community Councils (who hold the purse strings) and the isolation of many MACS. For these reasons, quality assurance strategies such as QIAS should remain entirely optional for Indigenous services and not be tied to funding as in mainstream services.

13.3 Isolation

The feedback from Coordinators suggests that urban as well as remote services may be isolated from support and encouragement. Demands placed upon Coordinators as they fulfil management, administrative, leadership, caring and education provider roles, within an often stressful environment, means that there is a high potential for burnout and subsequent loss of skills and knowledge to the Community.

The stresses experienced by the Coordinators include finding and keeping staff, dealing with sponsor groups who do not see child care as a high priority and/or who make decisions on behalf of the MACS with limited understanding of the issues identified by Coordinators, a sense that the work of child care is not appreciated, accountability requirements of funding and licensing bodies, and the impact of wider community issues such as poverty, poor health, poor housing, family violence, family breakdown, high rates of imprisonment and suicide, and substance abuse.

Most respondents requested State and national meetings with their peers. The experience of MACS Coordinators where such meetings are occurring has shown that they have a significant role in breaking down the isolation factor.

13.4 Administration and Finance Issues

Administration and finance issues were raised by a number of respondents, with several requests for computers and specialised MACS software, plus related training, to assist Coordinators to manage finances more effectively.

Some Coordinators employed by community councils were concerned about their lack of access to financial information and decision making processes. Some expressed frustration that they were unaware of the MACS centre's true financial position and had no way of finding out.

Other Coordinators employed by management committees had concerns about the lack of management experience and knowledge of some committee members, and commented on the need to keep committee members involved and informed, including those with low levels of literacy. This creates an additional workload for these Coordinators. It is likely that some MACS management committees, like some other community based management committees, would have difficulty understanding and interpreting financial reports.

Interest was shown in the development of a financial management / administrative resource which could be used by all MACS, encourage peer support between administrators and Coordinators and facilitate the development of a MACS financial management training package (when MACS were first established, they were set up with a Kalamazoo one write system, since outdated).

Some Coordinators alluded to the additional stress placed on them when inappropriate demands were made (such as requests for pays in advance or outside use of MACS vehicles). In small communities such demands can be difficult to resist.

Nationally, concerns were raised about the lack of funds for maintenance and replacement of facilities and equipment. Alternative sources of income may be limited. Fundraising from parents or other community members is not an option in many communities because of the high level of poverty and competing priorities.

A significant number of Coordinators raised collection of fees as an ongoing issue.

MACS in some areas cannot meet community needs for places, or offer more than basic services because the buildings are too small to be truly multifunctional and funds have not been found to enlarge premises or move to alternative sites.

13.5 Major Recommendations

There are four key recommendations made in the State Reports. They are:

1. National and State Meetings

MACS Coordinators, and to a lesser extent, staff and management committee members, need regular opportunities to meet with their peers for the purposes of training, information sharing, peer support and professional development.

National meeting held bi-annually, and State meetings held more frequently, could fulfil these needs.

The outcomes for coordinators are likely to be increased knowledge and skills, plus the motivation that comes from receiving affirmation and recognition for their work. The outcomes for children are likely to be improved quality of care. For staff, the outcome is likely to be an improved workplace.

The organisation and coordination of the national meetings was seen as a role for SNAICC, as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Islander children's services.

National meetings should also provide opportunities for those FaCS staff who are working with MACS and other Indigenous children's services, to meet together and with service providers.

2. Access to Mentoring Support and Resource and Advisory Services

The provision of 1:1 support and modelling is seen as a most effective, practical and appropriate means of supporting new Coordinators to reflect, plan and evaluate, as they take up their duties and learn on the job.

In addition, Coordinators should have access to culturally sensitive and aware resource and advisory services to provide information, advice and training tailored to meet the needs of operators and staff of MACS and other Indigenous children's services.

The outcomes of both the mentoring and resource services are likely to be similar to the outcomes of the National and State meetings, multiplying the value of the learning and skills development that comes from the meetings, while meeting individual needs.

Coordinators strongly supported the view that SNAICC should strengthen its role as a national voice for MACS, and look to SNAICC for continuing support, to raise awareness (in Government and in communities) of the importance of the role of the MACS centres.

3. Innovative Strategies to Increase Numbers of Qualified Indigenous Staff

The way forward for MACS services is tied up in the urgent need for more qualified Indigenous staff. Addressing this need requires innovative strategies that incorporate

- cultural awareness,
- effective student selection procedures and support,
- accessible training methods,
- adequate financial support for students,
- improved pay and conditions for child care workers, and
- awareness of the barriers to qualification faced by many Indigenous students.

Improved funding for MACS

The needs identified when MACS were first established remain today and the population of Indigenous children has increased, increasing demand for services.

Those interviewed for this report voiced unanimous support for the role of MACS, which is summarised in Chapter 4 of this report. In spite of this strong support for the concept of a holistic approach to the care and education of Indigenous children, many MACS centres are not truly 'multifunctional' as was first intended. MACS operators are restricted in the range of services they can offer to meet the children's needs because of financial considerations.

Coordinators of MACS support the retention of block funding as the only viable option for MACS services. Nevertheless, there is a need for more funded MACS places to meet needs in urban, rural and remote and isolated communities.

13.6 Conclusion

MACS, despite their contribution to the care, education, health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, appear to have been largely overlooked and taken for granted in the children's services sector.

This report indicates that there is an urgent need for priority to be given to support MACS to fulfil their child care role, let alone the multiple functions which they were first intended to meet.

The way forward is reasonably clear. National meetings of MACS will result in improved services and better communication between service providers and the funding body. Hands-on, culturally aware support for Coordinators will have positive flow-on effects for all associated with MACS, operators, staff, children, government agencies and communities. A vastly increased pool of trained and qualified Indigenous staff will strengthen MACS as a culturally appropriate learning and growing environment for Indigenous children.

14 National Recommendations

14.1 Introduction

At the SNAICC Annual General Meeting in November 2000 a forum was held with the MACS representatives from the SNAICC National Executive, other MACS in attendance at the AGM, representatives from SNAICC and the MACS Project Officer, Debbie Bond.

The forum provided an opportunity for some considered feedback on the draft national report and for the formulation of national recommendations. To further consider the development of national recommendations a teleconference was convened by SNAICC in the week following the AGM.

The recommendations below arise from the AGM MACS forum and teleconference and are based on the views of MACS as expressed in the MACS project report.

14.2 Training and Professional Development

As commented upon in all State and Territory reports there are currently too few opportunities for current staff of MACS to participate in a range of training and professional development opportunities.

Within this broad issue both formal and informal training needs require attention as do the needs of current staff in the sector and people seeking entry to the sector.

Entry level and formal training

In addition any initiatives in relation to training and professional development would need to recognise the particular needs of the various professions and support staff represented within MACS including:

- cooks and food handlers
- administrative staff
- child care workers
- pre school and kindergarten teachers
- co-ordinators and centre managers

Promoting and developing increased career opportunities in child care, early childhood development and pre school education services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should proceed as a major outcome from the report.

In Victoria there has been some success in increasing the number qualified Aboriginal people available to work in MACS through a specific DETYA training package.

SNAICC and the Department of Family and Community Services should pursue and negotiate with DETYA and other relevant training authorities the development of a long term training plan for child care services and pre school sector. "

Such a plan should address the needs of current staff and provide flexible options for staff to access training as well as ensuring that the increasing demand for qualified staff can be met. Flexibility needs to extend to providing resources for relief staff such that existing staff can take the required time to participate in training and education programs.

Further as staff gain qualifications the flow on implications for wages and salaries need to be recognised by the Commonwealth and specifically funded.

Professional Development, Support and Informal Training

In relation to the professional development and informal training and support needs of MACS staff the role of organisations including the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and Network SA/ARMSU was highlighted by MACS as examples of best practice in providing this support.

These agencies assist in promoting best practice, provide mentoring support to staff, support MACS seeking information on management issues and alert MACS to new and emerging issues.

It was noted at the SNAICC AGM MACS forum that the original MACS manual, developed and funded by the Commonwealth over 10 years ago to assist in the establishment and management of MACS had never been updated or reprinted. Services expressed disappointment that a central manual of this type had not been maintained and recommended that it be revised, reprinted and re distributed.

All States and Territories highlighted the need for staff from MACS to be able to attend inter agency meetings at both the State and National levels. There was strong support for SNAICC to continue as a national voice for MACS, a role SNAICC formally took on as a precursor to this project, and for a national meeting of MACS at least once every two years.

Recommendations

- That the Department of Family and Community Services pursue and negotiate with DETYA, SNAICC, ATSIC and relevant State and Territory training authorities the development of a long term training plan for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services and pre school sector.
- That the Department of Family and Community Services allocate specific resources for the development of Indigenous training and support agencies to cover all States and Territories.
- That training plan be developed after appropriate consultation with SNAICC, MACS and existing support agencies in order to 'model' the type of support and training to be provided taking into account the role of other existing agencies.
- That the funding model of MACs recognise the need to employ relief staff whilst permanent staff participate in education and training programs.

- That the core funding of SNAICC be appropriately increased to recognise that MACS have sought to utilise SNAICC as their national voice and link to the Commonwealth - and SNAICC has responded.
- That the Commonwealth allocate funds to support a national meetings of MACS, at least every two years, focussed on professional and sector development and promotion of best practice

14.3 Support for Community Management

Central to the existing model of MACS is the notion that centres are community managed by parents and community representatives. The report found that the capacity of MACS to draw the required mix of skills and expertise required to manage what is in effect a small business enterprise varies markedly.

Not only will this vary from place to place but it will vary from year to year as parents and community members represented on management committees change.

Whilst this is not a unique experience to MACS high levels of unemployment, low levels of education and experiences of being socially and economically excluded permeate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This makes the task of developing effective community based management even more difficult for MACS compared to other community based children's services.

There was strong support from all States and Territories for the role of support agencies such as VAEAI and Network SA/ARMSU to extend to include supporting committees of management. Network SA/ARMSU already provide significant support in this area.

Recommendation

- That in expanding the role and work of support and training agencies as recommended above that the needs of volunteers on committees of management be specifically addressed.

14.4 Capital Works

Major Capital Works

It was widely noted that the capacity of the existing MACS to extend the number of long day care or kindergarten places they provide is limited by the scope of physical facilities. In addition their capacity to provide complementary services and programs is limited by the physical limitations of the centres.

This general issue has been exacerbated by the lack of any clear policy direction from the Commonwealth in relation to the provision of funds for major capital works and

the variation in attitudes to capital works between the responsible Commonwealth staff in each State and Territory.

It is implicit in the name of MACS that the services provided will extend beyond long day care child care provision. Yet the capacity of the existing MACS to seek complementary funding for other service types is truncated by the limitation of buildings and facilities.

Whilst some centres, such as Kaurna Plains, have been able through co-location to provide children and families with access to other services this is the exception not the rule. Others such as Birreelee in NSW have demand from families, building plans, council permits and land to allow for service expansion but not access to capital.

If MACS are to be multifunctional in more than name then their buildings and facilities must also be multifunctional. To date layers of State, Territory and Commonwealth licensing and accreditation requirements associated with child care provision have dictated the layout and configuration of physical assets.

The Commonwealth needs to provide realistic access to major capital funding such that each MACS can develop their facilities to both expand child care provision and provide a realistic opportunity for multifunctional service provision.

Recommendation

- That the Commonwealth develop a submission based major capital works program in 2000/2001 and fund the program in 2001/2002 to provide for the expansion of MACS buildings and facilities enabling multifunctional service provision.

Minor Capital Works

In most States and Territories there have been no advertised minor capital works funding rounds through which current minor capital works needs could be addressed. As with major capital works the process and timelines for accessing minor capital works need to be made clear.

Even more importantly the Commonwealth's allocation for minor capital works needs to be set at a level to address some urgent needs and then be sustained at a level to provide for maintenance and replacement of capital items.

Communications and Information Technology

Currently the vast majority of centres have limited if any access to contemporary communications and information technology with the project only able to identify one MACS with email and internet access.

This has serious implications for all aspects of their service provision including:

- finance and administration
- implementation of the GST
- networking and professional development

- access to Commonwealth and other government information on other funding and grants
- management of Child Care Benefit
- providing children, particularly in 3 - 5 age group, with access to computers as part of the education program of the centre

Where MACS do have access to computers it is typically where they have secured access to computers being given away by other Indigenous agencies such as ATSIC.

Dependence on relatively old and outdated computer equipment limits access to software with for instance GST capable accounting packages being beyond the capacity of the computers most MACS centres use.

Obviously this creates inefficiencies in centre management, as tasks such as preparation of GST Business Activity Statements, must be completed manually.

It was highlighted by VAEAI that all mainstream centres were eligible to receive a \$1,500 grant after electronically submitting successive quarterly CCB statements.

MACS were excluded from this arrangement despite their obvious needs for new computers, software and training in their use.

Transport and Vehicles

Another major need for MACS is being able to purchase, replace or lease vehicles including buses.

Most centres work to provide some transport assistance to families and where necessary pick up and drop off children. This is important given the higher levels of poverty and unemployment which impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Access to vehicles also increases the capacity of MACS to deliver out of school hours care programs, vacation care programs, assist children and families access cultural activities during NAIDOC week etc and enables centres to work with local health, education and dental programs where such programs cannot visit centres.

The Commonwealth needs to address the need of many centres to purchase, replace or lease vehicles which will support and promote access to their programs and enable additional services to be provided.

Recommendations

- That the Commonwealth fund a minor capital works program in 2000/2001 to provide all MACS with access to current communications and information technology including computers and software for email access, internet access and financial management.
- That the Commonwealth fund a one off program to enable all 37 MACS to gain access to and effectively utilise email and the internet

- That the Commonwealth investigate and fund the provision of a common accounting and financial management computer package for all 37 MACS
- That the Commonwealth fund a minor capital works program in 2000/2001 to provide all MACS with access to appropriate vehicles to support current programs and program expansion

14.5 Service and Funding Model

There was strong support from all States and Territories for the theoretical base to the current Multifunctional service model.

Implicit in the MACS service model is support for the following:

- services being first and foremost child focussed
- community development and control
- local responsiveness
- parent and family involvement
- professionalism and quality
- programs and practices which are culturally relevant
- flexibility and capacity to respond to a variety of needs for children and families

Equally there was a strong sense of frustration at the failure of the funding model to match up with the Multifunctional service model.

The Commonwealth funding model for MACS which whilst different to the funding model for other child care services is still in effect a funding model for the provision of long day care.

Whilst long day care child care provision may appropriately be the core business of MACS it should not be the only business recognised within the funding model. MACS, as the name suggests, are expected by their communities to do many things but are funded to do one thing.

There are examples of the funding model supporting the employment of 'Outreach Workers' or 'MACS Support Welfare Workers' to work with children and families outside the restrictions of the child care program.

These positions appear to have operated and existed at the discretion of the Commonwealth's State and Territory based offices. Through the SNAICC AGM MACS forum and subsequent teleconference there was strong support expressed for the allocation of such positions to each MACS centre on a more permanent basis.

The decline in the number of these positions reflected other concerns regarding the wide variance in the funding priorities between States and Territories. This is clearly reflected in the State and Territory sections of this report - all of which are quite unique.

It would appear that the broad banding of MACS funding whilst bringing additional flexibility has at the same time seen the service model of MACS become less well defined.

On fundamental issues such as access to capital works funding, funding according to licensed or approved places, retention of 'Outreach Worker' positions and use of special services funding, broad banding has created uncertainty and a lack of transparency in relation to funding.

Combined with the clear sense of isolation from each other that most centres report, (particularly those without an agency like VAEAI to support them), it is not surprising that the MACS feel somewhat neglected and insignificant in the eyes of the Commonwealth Government.

There is a pressing need to affirm and support the MACS service model and ensure that the current funding arrangements are adjusted to match that service model. Currently it could be said that the reverse is happening.

Recommendations

- That the broad and flexible service model for MACS, as outlined here, be retained and supported
- That the funding arrangements for MACS properly recognise the broad service model and specifically provide support to each centre for:
 - ⇒ a MACS Outreach or Welfare Support Worker
 - ⇒ programs beyond child care provision, including parenting and youth support programs, youth activity programs, community development programs and other services in response to local needs
- That Indigenous resource and support agencies in each State and Territory, such as VAEAI, Network SA/ARMSU and JCSU (Qld), be funded to support MACS manage a broader set of programs

14.6 Child care places and utilisation

As reported in Chapter 3 the age structure of the Indigenous population is markedly different than that of the broader Australian community. Whilst the broader community may have seen some decline or peak in demand for child care places, within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community the reverse is true.

Over the coming decade that demand will continue to rise sharply. As has already been noted by the Commonwealth's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000 - 2004 the proportion of Indigenous children participating in pre school education has declined in recent years, as there has been no growth in places.

In other policy areas such as employment, juvenile justice and child protection the impact of the age structure on program provision is being noted. It needs to be noted

and planned for in relation to the provision of services by MACS including the provision of long day care places.

Even if demand were to stay at current rates the Commonwealth should expect a 40% increase in the demand for actual places over the rest of the decade due to higher birth rates and higher proportion of Indigenous people under the age of 30.

Whilst this report did not collect specific details of each centre's utilisation rates nearly all reported a need to expand places in order to meet demand. This should be treated as relatively good news as it would appear to reflect the wide acceptance and appropriateness of the services MACS provide.

However the current high demand for places needs to be met and the capacity of the sector expanded to meet future demand. To do so the Commonwealth will need to implement a number of complementary strategies including:

- expanding the capacity of the current 37 MACS to meet current and future demand
- expanding the number of MACS by funding the development of new centres in areas with significant population centres and no other appropriate service providers
- supporting the increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in other forms of child care

It has been noted by this report that according to the latest Commonwealth Child Care Census, approximately half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in long day care access that care through a MACS. Obviously then half access child care through some other service.

Thus in planning for the expansion of child care provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children the Commonwealth will need to consider more than the MACS. In South Australia for instance there are more Aboriginal child care centres operating than there are MACS. These services face difficulties of their own including complying with the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System which are beyond the scope of this report.

Some MACS have expanded their places by opting in to the accreditation system and accessing 'mainstream places'. This has the disadvantage of adding further complexity to funding and accountability requirements.

The clear preference coming through the report was for the MACS funding model to be broadened to match the service model, as elaborated earlier, and for the number of MACS funded places to be expanded.

Secondly expanding the number of actual centres should occur after proper consideration of demand in areas with significant Indigenous population. Providing advice on possible new locations for MACS is beyond the scope of this project report. However the detailed information in Chapter 3 provides a good starting point for such deliberations.

This is seen as preferable to seeking to expand participation in other mainstream centres or other forms of child care as this option does not recognise the

Multifunctional focus of MACS. By expanding MACS the Commonwealth will expand more than just child care provision.

Recommendations:

- That the Commonwealth expand the number of MACS funded places available to the current 37 MACS sufficient to meet current unmet demand
- That the Commonwealth call for submissions from the current 37 MACS in relation to their need for additional places
- The Commonwealth convene a working party to plan the expansion of child care places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families taking into consideration the age structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population with a view to:
 - providing additional MACS centres in communities with high need, and
 - providing access to MACS funding for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care centres which are not funded through the MACS program
- The working party include representatives from the Department of Family and Community Services, SNAICC and ATSIC.

14.7 Accreditation and Best Practice

The experience of MACS with the child care Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) process and format would seem to have varied quite markedly.

Whilst some have volunteered to participate and done so successfully others have found the process, not necessarily the requirements, to be difficult and intimidating.

There was strong support for an increase in the number of Indigenous reviewers it being noted that there is currently only one Indigenous reviewer in Australia. The prerequisites for being a reviewer which include years of experience as a trained child care worker would appear to mitigate against an expansion in the number of Indigenous reviewers.

It may be necessary to develop a system of having dual reviewers including Indigenous people with substantial experience working in a MACS or other Indigenous children's services. This needs to be taken up by the Department with the Accreditation Council.

There was also strong in principle support for the concept of accreditation and a recognition that systems for improving and verifying quality were essential. With most of the MACS choosing not to participate in the QIAS there had been no alternative system to assess and improve quality.

Combined with the lack of professional development opportunities for staff, the lack of attention and resources dedicated to quality practice and program development at

the system level, (ie MACS services have worked on this - but the broader system hasn't), is a major concern.

The capacity of MACS to participate in the QIAS and the process of seeking accreditation need urgent attention. The report recommends that participation in the QIAS remain voluntary as to do otherwise may precipitate extreme difficulties for some MACS which are beyond their control to manage.

Developing a mentoring program between MACS which have succeeded in accreditation and others is one way forward. Another recommendation was the development of a manual on the accreditation system and best practice.

Currently there is no systematic national approach to the documentation of best practice programs, service guides or the inclusion of Indigenous culture, languages and child rearing practices into centre based child care programs. Whilst every MACS is implementing quality programs, the opportunities for the children's services sector and others to learn about their programs remain limited.

The SNAICC AGM MACS forum also noted the recent development of the Cultural Awareness Team within Network SA/ARMSU. This was seen as an extremely effective way of delivering cultural awareness training and improving early childhood development programs. Developing similar services for all States and Territories was favoured by the forum.

It was noted that agencies which had been contracted by the Commonwealth to assist all services with accreditation were not able to provide MACS with the specific support they may need to seek accreditation. Contracting Indigenous specific agencies to support MACS seeking accreditation was seen as preferable to current arrangements.

Recommendations

- That the Department of Family and Community Services convene a meeting between SNAICC and the Accreditation Council to pursue issues raised in this report
- That participation in the QIAS for MACS remain voluntary
- That the Department of Family and Community Services fund the development, printing and distribution of an accreditation manual and guide to best practice for MACS
- That the Department of Family and Community Services engage Indigenous specific agencies to
 - assist MACS and other Indigenous children's services prepare for and participate in the QIAS, and
 - deliver cultural awareness training to child care centres, Indigenous and non Indigenous, and to assist in program development for Indigenous children

14.8 Child Care Benefit

Perhaps reflecting the variance in the way in which State and Territory Department of Family and Community Services offices work with MACS there was a large variation in the extent to which the new system of Child Care Benefit was understood by MACS.

It was apparent that some MACS had been provided with no effective briefings or support in understanding the new CCB and its implications for them. In addition MACS, unlike all other child care services, were left with the responsibility of undertaking assessments for CCB eligibility a task which Centrelink normally performs. Reasons for this are unclear. Certainly though it would seem unreasonable for MACS to be expected to perform Centrelink's duties with no support and assistance.

Recommendation

- That the Department of Family and Community Services work with Centrelink to ensure that MACS services are properly briefed on the Child Care Benefit and not required to undertake assessments for fee relief which would otherwise be carried out by Centrelink.