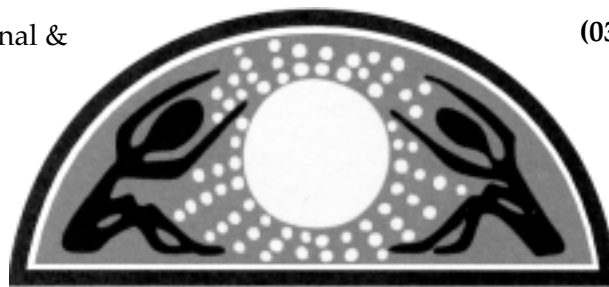


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SNAICC NEWS

Secretariat National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care Newsletter

March 2004 Edition

Working together: toward a national policy for child protection and recovery

The following is the text of a speech delivered by the SNAICC Chairperson, Muriel Cadd, at a recent national summit on child abuse convened by the AMA in Canberra.

Introduction

“I would like to begin today by recognising that we are gathered here on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people.

Like all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia the history of the Ngunnawal extends beyond all other chapters of human history and is rich with culture and traditions, language, story telling, dance, arts, spiritual practices and beliefs, knowledge and wisdom.

Sadly though our more recent history has been tainted with stories of violence and dispossession, child removal and family break up, forced relocation, poverty and marginalisation. The next chapter in our shared history is being written today and it concerns the future of Ngunnawal children and of all the Indigenous children in Australia.

SNAICC appreciates the opportunity to gather here in Ngunnawal country to discuss these issues and as the dancers showed us this morning children and young people are the key to ensuring that our culture remains strong.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank the Australian Medical Association for convening this summit. Whilst child abuse and neglect are issues which have been on the national agenda in recent times we need to sustain the focus on children if we

are to make progress. For over 20 years SNAICC has advocated that we need national policy on child protection. We are pleased then that the AMA has convened this summit to build partnerships to pursue that goal.

Historical context

Since the earliest days of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subjected to harsh, discriminatory, racist and profoundly damaging policies of state intervention into the lives of their families.

Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century control and forcible removal of children from their families became the dominating intervention in child welfare practice, often motivated by the desire to eliminate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by preventing their children from being raised as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

This racism was based on the belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people weren't good enough or capable of looking after their own children. That our children would be better off away from their parents, families and communities. As I will touch on later this racism is still present in our child protection systems today which in many instances still assumes our children would be better off away from their family and community.

The policies and practices of child removal gave rise to what has become known as the *Stolen Generations* with calls for a national apology and compensation to those affected featuring as prominent political issues in recent years.

SNAICC was in fact the first national organisation to call for an inquiry into the *Stolen Generations*. SNAICC has also been at the forefront in calling for a national apology to the *Stolen Generations* from the Federal Parliament and we again call upon our elected political leaders to support a national apology. Whilst we know what the current Prime Minister thinks about this issue the views of the Opposition leader are a little less clear. SNAICC was heartened by the strong stand the two most recent leaders of the Federal ALP took in support of a national apology and we trust the current leader, Mr Latham, will have the heart to support an apology. Being all brains and no heart is no recipe for success.

Child removal policies and the economic, social and political segregation of Aboriginal people throughout Australia, for a period of a hundred years or more, laid the foundation for the unemployment, poverty, homelessness, poor educational access and family dysfunction which Indigenous people experience today.

Arrangements for the welfare of Indigenous children today need to recognise this historical legacy – not by making excuses for perpetrators of abuse or violence – but by addressing the underlying causes of abuse and neglect.

The Current Situation

In considering these issues it is not sufficient to speak about child abuse without explicitly speaking about family violence and child neglect. Neglect and the impact of violence are issues which seem to get lost in the discussion about child abuse. They are however very significant factors amongst the complex reasons which lead to so many of our families having contact with child protection authorities.

As participants at this summit would probably know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over represented in the child protection system including in out-of-home care. As noted in the recent report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2003 – 2003; our children are up to ten times more likely to be removed from home and placed in out-of-home care.

However the reasons why our children enter the child protection system differ from the reasons for

other children. Child neglect – not child abuse - is the most significant cause of Indigenous children coming into contact with child protection. Another significant difference, particularly in Victoria, is the higher incidence of emotional abuse as a result of children witnessing and living with family violence. The harm children suffer when they are exposed to violence is now recognised as a form of emotional abuse and this has led to an increase in child protection notifications.

When we understand that child neglect is the major contributor to child protection notifications for our children it becomes clear that the most effective way to protect Indigenous children is to strengthen their families and develop Indigenous communities.

We cannot escape the fact that impoverished communities raise impoverished children and that poverty remains the single greatest cause of family breakdown, child neglect and child removal. Not sexual assault, not violence, not alcohol or other forms of substance abuse, not bad parenting - but child neglect where poverty prevents families from being able to care for their children.

A focus on child development

In order to start addressing the underlying causes of child abuse and neglect we need to invest in the development of children. Our children are three times less likely to access early childhood services than other Australian children but six times more likely to be in the care and protection system. This is not a coincidence.

We must improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to culturally appropriate early childhood services, programs and support and provide our children with a better start in life. Whilst the Commonwealth has said a great deal about the importance of the early years we need some stronger leadership and stronger investment. A good place to start would be in relation to Commonwealth funded child care and family support services. The next Federal Budget should, if we are serious about investing in the early years, substantially expand Commonwealth child care services and family support programs for Indigenous communities.

Until Indigenous children can expect to grow up in an environment that meets their developmental needs we will continue to have Indigenous children over represented in child protection.

Listening to the voices of Indigenous people

So where have we gone wrong ?

As I mentioned earlier SNAICC's view is that the racism that led people to take or children away in the past century lives on. At each and every level of the child protection system decisions continue to be made about the welfare and future of our children without us at the table. Our voices are still not being heard when and where it matters.

By way of example at the national level the Commonwealth State and Territory Governments have recently established an inter-governmental working group, the Indigenous Services Working Group, to examine issues relation to Indigenous child protection. This group has no representation or input from SNAICC or any other Indigenous organisations, communities or families.

At the local practice level decisions continue to be made on a daily basis about the removal of our children from their families and placement of these children into non-Aboriginal care with no family or community input.

Currently our systems of child protection mistakenly see children as individual victims rather than as members of a family and community which may also have been victimised, neglected or abused. Too often our child welfare interventions focus exclusively on the child and fail to address the needs of the family and community to which the child belongs. Too often the response is to remove a child but leave behind a dysfunctional family and an impoverished community to bring another child into the world.

SNAICC argues that fundamental reforms are required to shift our systems of child protection from their narrow risk and resiliency focus to a broader more holistic focus based around community development and family support.

This is in fact what Aboriginal people have been advocating since the 1970's including at the First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar convened in 1979 by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, VACCA.

In a workshop on Aboriginal Community Involvement the seminar recommended that the development of Aboriginal Child Care Agencies be supported with agencies to be expanded to ensure state wide coverage in all States and Territories.

Significantly it recommended that these agencies be focused broadly on family support and primary prevention of family breakdown. This hasn't happened. Whilst there are over 30 such agencies operating in Australia they have typically only been funded to work in the tertiary end of the child protection system and agencies have not been established in most parts of Australia.

There was a shared concern amongst delegates, black and white, for the survival of Aboriginal children and families given the high rates of family breakdown and institutionalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The seminar heard reports of the massive over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare institutions and advocated for Indigenous home based care.

Last year SNAICC gathered people again, including some from 1979, at the National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar – Our Future Generations. Delegates noted that there had been significant progress in providing home based care to replace institutional care through the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

However behind the successes of the past two decades lies the ongoing failure to reduce the over representation of Indigenous children in the care and protection system of each State and Territory. Undoubtedly we have better ways of caring for Indigenous children removed from home but the rates of child removal are in reality no better than they were 23 years ago.

Reform proposals

SNAICC has outlined a number of reform proposals in a paper we have prepared for this summit. These proposals reflect much of the discussion at *Our Future Generations* as well as SNAICC's independent analysis of the needs of children.

We ask delegates to read the paper and support the proposals in your various workshops.

In summary the key reforms SNAICC proposes are:

1. Making a **formal apology** to the *Stolen Generations* through the Federal Parliament.
2. Establishing a **National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council** as a

- partnership between SNAICC, ATSIC, the Commonwealth and each State and Territory Government to drive child protection reforms and oversee the expansion of early childhood support services and programs.
3. Expanding **funding for Commonwealth funded children's services** in the next Federal Budget - minimum of \$15 million per annum.
 4. Establishing progressive targets for **reducing the current rate of Indigenous child removal** by State/Territory welfare authorities.
 5. Establishing **national benchmarks for all government services** to ensure planning takes account of the high proportion of Indigenous people under the age of 30, (70%).
 6. Implementing recommendations from *Bringing Them Home* in relation to **National Standards legislation and National Framework legislation** to reform child protection
 7. Establishing and funding a **National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre** to developing culturally appropriate community based child abuse prevention programs
 8. Providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with **improved access to culturally appropriate family support services** to combat family breakdown
 9. Improve compliance with the **Aboriginal Child Placement Principle** through strategies including improved financial and other support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers.

Conclusion

We know that significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to grow up in circumstances which mean they will confront disadvantage and injustices which most children in Australia will, fortunately, never know.

That so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children overcome the prejudice and disadvantage which confronts them is a source of inspiration to SNAICC and our members who work closely with them. Let their courage inspire you to pursue the far reaching reforms required to ensure our children our safe, well and able to reach their full potential."

QLD Crime and Misconduct Commission - Inquiry into the abuse of Children in Foster Care

Last year the QLD Crime and Misconduct Commission conducted an inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care and handed down a report in January. Since that time the Queensland Government has appointed Peter Forster to develop a blueprint on implementing the CMC report's recommendations.

The CMC report recommended the creation of a new Department of Child Safety to take responsibility for child protection matters.

SNAICC and the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, AICCAs, in Queensland have been working together to provide input into the implementation of the CMC report. This has included advocating for the expansion of Indigenous agencies working in the area of child and family welfare and strengthening their roles in relation to family support and early intervention, advising on the best interests of children at risk of abuse or neglect, providing alternative care services and support family reunification and restoration.

SNAICC and the AICCAs have advocated that in order to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families some key reforms are required including:

- Expanding the number and scope of AICCAs to include early intervention and family support
- Developing protocols between AICCAs and the new Department of Child Safety to ensure that AICCAs are utilised for advice in relation to the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; including as a last resort the placement of children in out-of-home care
- Strengthening the role of AICCAs in the recruitment, training and assessment of foster carers
- Extending financial and other forms of support to kinship carers
- Re-establishing a statewide peak body for

AICCAs

- Developing in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities a culturally appropriate risk assessment framework to guide decision making in relation to the children at risk of abuse and/or neglect
- Establishing a policy council as a partnership between the Queensland government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to determine child welfare policy for Indigenous children

SNAICC will continue to work with the AICCAs in Queensland on the development of these child protection reforms. *More information about the CMC inquiry is available at:* <http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/>

SNAICC Chairperson, Muriel Cadd AM, recognised with Australia Day award !

Muriel Cadd the SNAICC Chairperson was recognised for her outstanding contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the recent Australia Day awards. Muriel has been made a Member of the Order of Australia. Muriel has indicated that she was happy to receive the award as it provides recognition of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the work that all of SNAICC's members and other agencies do for children. All at SNAICC are pleased and proud of her leadership, achievements and commitment to children.

Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

SNAICC has recently commenced some policy work in relation to the current operation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in each State and Territory. The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was agreed to by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Ministers over 20 years ago. The principle outlines that the removal of Indigenous children from their families must only occur as a last resort and the preferable placement options should a child be removed. At present the wording and

implementation of the principle varies and compliance is not monitored or assessed in a systematic manner.

SNAICC considers that there are significant issues in the current operation of the principle with State and Territory child welfare authorities not willing or able to meet the intent of the principle. Across Australia as many as 25% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families are placed with non-Indigenous carers and the rate or removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families is six times higher than for other children.

In several States and Territories including the ACT, NT, Queensland and Victoria child welfare legislation is currently or about to be reviewed and SNAICC will be pursuing with Governments in these states a strengthening of the principle within legislation.

SNAICC AGM and Elections

The SNAICC Annual General Meeting was held at Risdon Cove in Hobart last December in partnership with the Aboriginal Children's Centre. As part of the AGM SNAICC members identified a broad range of issues for SNAICC to work on over the coming year including:

- Compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle
- Permanency planning/permanent care arrangements in child protection
- Accreditation of Indigenous children's services/child care centres
- Developing stronger partnerships between SNAICC and other national Indigenous organisations such as NAJAC, NAILS and NACCHO,
- Developing service models for child protection and alternative care for rural and remote communities,
- Supporting the expansion of AICCAs and the broadening of their programs with particular emphasis on supporting AICCAs in Queensland,

- Pursuing further research into international models for Indigenous child welfare, and
- Advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the lead up to the Federal election.

As part of the SNAICC AGM elections were held for the SNAICC national executive, our governing body, and the following delegates were elected to represent their State/Territory.

In relation to office bearers the following delegates were elected:

- SNAICC Chairperson: Muriel Cadd (Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, VACCA)
- Deputy Chairperson - Child and family welfare: Garry Matthews (Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Family Care)
- Deputy Chairperson -Early childhood: Geraldine Atkinson (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, VAEAI)
- Treasurer: Dorothy Bagshaw (Gurlongaa Njininj MACS Perth)
- Secretary: Tanya Ardler; Wreck Bay MACS

Other delegates elected to the National Executive were;

Northern Territory:

Veronica Johns (Remote Area Aboriginal Children's Support Unit, RACCSU) and Wendy Pautjimi (Karu Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency)

New South Wales:

Dot Whyman (NSW Aboriginal Children's Services) and Shirley Wilson (Allira MACS Dubbo)

Victoria:

Alf Bamblett (VACSAI)

Queensland:

Rosemary Pratt, (Kalwun AICCA), Clarissa Malone (Gundoo MACS) and Ray Bogongie (MacKay AICCA)

Western Australia:

Dawn Wallam (Yorganop)

South Australia: Gwen Owen and Sharron Williams (Aboriginal Family Support Service) and Leona Smith (Kurna Plains Early Childhood Centre)

Tasmania: Tina Harrison (Tasmania Aboriginal Child Care Association) and Alison Overeem (Aboriginal Children's Centre / TAC Hobart)

Case studies – Indigenous early childhood

SNAICC recently completed a project with the Centre for Community Child Health, CCCH, which documented over 30 case studies of Indigenous community based projects or programs focussed on addressing the developmental needs of young children. One of the case studies, from Coffs Harbour, is featured in this edition of SNAICC news and the full report can be obtained from SNAICC or from the SNAICC website; <http://www.snaicc.asn.au>

Through Young Black Eyes – SNAICC Publications Reprint

Through the Australian Governments *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*, PADV, program SNAICC's recent publication on family violence and child abuse, *Through Young Black Eyes* has been reprinted. Agencies can now order up to 20 free copies with no charge for postage or handling.

There are three publications in the *Through Young Black Eyes* set.

- *Through Young Black Eyes – Handbook* to protect Indigenous children from family violence and child abuse. 124 page handbook / **Product Code AO56599**
- *Through Young Black Eyes – Community Leader's Guide* to assist Indigenous leaders at the local community level to respond to family violence and child abuse. 16 page booklet / **Product Code AO56926**

- ***Through Young Black Eyes – How Safe is your family?*** Single page brochure for parents and families on protecting Indigenous children from harm. Brochure/ **Product Code AO56963**

Copies can be obtained free of charge by contacting the distribution agency, RMS DAS. You must quote the product code and you can fax, email or post your orders to;

RMS DAS

PO Box 655

Fyshwick ACT 2609

Ph: 02 6202 5736

Fax: 02 6202 5788

Email: jamie.walker@rmsdas.com or
veronica.warren@rmsdas.com

PADV

PH: (02) 6271 5756

Fax: (02) 6721 5751

www.dpmc.gov.au/osw/padv/index.html

) SNAICC gratefully acknowledges the support of the Office of the Status Women, OSW, PADV program and strongly recommends that people visit the PADV website to obtain a full list of their extensive free resources and publications. <http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au>

Our Future Generations - The National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar.

Last July in partnership with the Australian Government, Victorian Government, ATSIC and Reconciliation Australia SNAICC convened a national seminar focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The seminar developed over 100 recommendations that require action from the Governments, SNAICC, ATSIC and other organisations at the national level.

SNAICC is publishing a full report on the seminar including all recommendations and is providing copies of the recommendations to all governments. The report will be available from SNAICC and on our website in April. Summary recommendations are also being sent to the Commonwealth Minister for Children and Youth, Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Community Services Ministers in all States and Territories. These summary recommendations cover the following areas;

Greater Support for Prevention and Early Intervention Services for children and families

A strong feeling of the Seminar was that governments should work to prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting a range of prevention and early intervention initiatives. There is enormous scope to protect and improve the health, happiness and prospects of Indigenous children through family support programs and initiatives that reduce stress, isolation, substance abuse, illness and disabilities and build physical and mental health, self esteem and parenting skills.

Development of a National Indigenous Family Violence and Child Abuse Healing Strategy

As a partnership between SNAICC, ATSIC and the Australian Government a national healing and education strategy. The strategy should address healing for victims and perpetrators of family violence and child abuse and empower community leaders who are trusted and respected in their own communities to help with healing and education.

Establishing an Indigenous Children's Services National Workforce Development Strategy

A National Workforce Development Strategy (NWDS) for Indigenous children's services should be developed. The NWDS should identify and respond to the workforce needs of Indigenous child and family welfare and early learning and care services.

Establishing a National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Council

Establishment of a joint policy council between SNAICC, ATSIC, the Australian government and State and Territory governments to take carriage of long term reforms to Indigenous child welfare policy and responding to the developmental needs of Indigenous children.

Foster Care/Kinship Care Reforms

Governments should, through the National Plan for Foster Care implement reforms in relation to foster care for Indigenous children to provide foster carers and kinship carers with adequate financial and other support based on the findings and recommendations of The Costs of Caring.

- **Development of National Quality Standards and Accreditation for Indigenous child care provision.**

Establishment of a partnership process between SNAICC, FaCS and the National Childcare Accreditation Council to develop national quality standards and an accreditation system for Indigenous child care provision.

- **Reforms to State and Territory based child protection systems**

The seminar developed a range of recommendations relating to the current child protection systems of each State and Territory. SNAICC is pursuing these reforms as a matter of priority within each jurisdiction and through the Community Services Ministers Conference.

COFF'S HARBOUR ABORIGINAL FAMILY COMMUNITY CARE CENTRE INC. - NEW SOUTH WALES

In November 2001, an independent evaluation was conducted of available services in the Coff's Harbour area on the northeast coast of NSW. Staff of Coff's Harbour Aboriginal Family Community Care Centre (CHAFCCC) were concerned at the low levels of Aboriginal families' participation in mainstream services. In addition, some local mainstream services asked CHAFCCC why they did not refer Aboriginal people to their programs. CHAFCCC and Burnside Uniting Care family support agency entered into discussions about this very low participation of Aboriginal people in their services and what might be done to improve this. It became clear that Burnside and a number of other mainstream agencies needed training to become more culturally appropriate. The two agencies agreed on a memorandum of understanding aimed at developing more culturally appropriate practices so that more Aboriginal people would feel comfortable in accessing services. The partnership has also developed a combined system of intake and referral for people coming in to either of their services. Indicators of improvement in Aboriginal access to mainstream agencies will be monitored.

There are 3 aspects to the program:

1. Training Aboriginal mentors for first-time parents of 0 to 5 year old children

The two agencies decided that a program to support young first time Aboriginal parents around pregnancy and early parenting in the community was needed, as many of these parents were not accessing these services. A mentor scheme was raised as one possible approach for discussion. An early step in the planning was to consult the local Aboriginal community about such an approach. Community members were then asked what qualities they would like to see in an Aboriginal mentor. The approach was discussed and planned

carefully over some time. People were encouraged to apply for the mentor positions. Interviews were held with possible mentors, drawn from people according to a number of factors. These factors included being known and respected in the community, worked in the community, how they raised their own children, their particular skills, their time constraints, level of maturity and their cultural base. 16 people were interviewed and 10 chosen to receive mentor training. The mentors chosen were aged between 24 and 50 years, and there were equal numbers of male and female mentors.

Training of the 10 mentors began at the beginning of 2003. The group has been deliberately kept small so there will be high levels of support for the potential mentors. A training package was developed by two program coordinators to meet the needs of the potential mentors. It includes understanding the role of mentor and ways of developing helping supportive relationships with new mothers. The mentors will receive education about referral systems, ways of accessing services, the role of midwives and other professionals, early detection of post-natal depression, learning about family and community involvement, and how to encourage new parents to be involved in the scheme. They will also learn about their limits and their responsibilities when working with people, such as treating things that a new parent might discuss as confidential, and recognition of their limits when being a mentor to a parent. The training is due to finish in December 2003.

The group chose four 2-day weekends as part of their training, when they went to the local Aboriginal Corporation and were trained by an experienced Aboriginal teacher / facilitator. Training included a lot of role-playing certain situations with a parent, and exploring different possibilities that might arise

in working with a parent. The local TAFE will provide a certificate of Mentoring for those who complete the training, as a consultant from TAFE is overseeing the training to ensure that an appropriate standard is maintained. It is hoped that the course may be picked up by TAFE as an accredited TAFE course which may open up pathways to further accredited study for these mentors (eg welfare studies).

2. Mentors for fathers

Burnside has now developed a men's program for all men interested in attending. 5 men will be trained to act as mentors to run other men's groups, and it is hoped that in the future an Aboriginal man will be trained as a mentor.

3. Mentoring selected Aboriginal people to run playgroups

Burnside staff are training people (mentors) to run Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal playgroups with parents and their young children. They will try to encourage families to come to the playgroups. These

mentors will be taught about how to run a playgroup and how to help or counsel people in the playgroups who have problems (such as problems with their children).

The above three initiatives will be monitored for their success in helping Aboriginal families to access mainstream services, and for the success of agencies like Burnside to work with Indigenous families in ways that are more culturally-appropriate.

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Parenting Project Report

The SNAICC Parenting Project has come about primarily as a result of the feedback gathered during consultations held under the National Agenda for Early Childhood. The feedback given to the Commonwealth government indicated parents want access to more information and programs. Consequently, the Department of Family & Community Services, FaCS, has contracted the Centre for Community Child Health, CCCH, to undertake a national consultative project on parenting information and programs with the non-Indigenous community, and SNAICC, contracted to consult with the Indigenous community.

SNAICC has committed to undertake several processes during the project, which will cumulate in a final report to be provided to FaCS. These processes include a literature review, audit of current information and programs, consultations with key stakeholders, focus groups held with workers, parents and caregivers, and finally a national workshop.

The information gathered during the project and the final report will be used by the Department of Family & Community Services to support the development of new parenting

initiatives, policies and programs relating to parenting information and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers.

The aims of the national project is to identify and document:

- Best practice parenting programs and information for Indigenous Australian parents/carers/communities and the most appropriate service delivery mechanisms, including an overview of programs and information currently available for the various target groups;
- What parents/carers/communities need to know and when;
- How best to get it to them;
- What programs and information are out there; and
- What are the gaps in information available and information for the specific target groups?

Target groups include Indigenous people in transition to parenthood, and Indigenous parent/carers in remote, rural, regional and metropolitan areas.

Northern Territory Child Protection – Update

Last year SNAICC published a report on the systemic failure of the child protection system in the Northern Territory. Since the release of the report, *State of Denial – the Neglect and Abuse of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory*, the NT government has moved to strengthen the child protection system and review their child welfare legislation.

Specifically the NT government has established a review of the child protection system, a separate by linked review of their child welfare legislation and released some significant additional funding to support immediate reforms to the child protection system. This includes a package of funding initiatives totaling \$53.8 million over the next five years. The NT government has also established a

Caring for Our Children Reference Group with stakeholders to steer the reform process.

SNAICC is pleased that the NT government has responded to the need to improve the child welfare and protection system with significant additional funding and a commitment to work with stakeholders to review the system and the legislation.

Details of the reforms in the NT can be found at <http://www.health.nt.gov.au/> whilst the SNAICC report is available on the SNAICC website <http://www.snaicc.asn.au>

2002-2003 Child Protection Statistics for Indigenous Children

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) *Child Protection Australia 2002-03* report was released in January 2004. The report shows that in all states and territories, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were more likely to be involved in child protection systems than other Australian children. Across Australia, Indigenous children were six times more likely to be subject to a care and protection order than other children, while the rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was nearly seven times the rate of other Australian children.

23.4% of children in out-of-home care are Indigenous; an alarming statistic given the 2001 Census showed that Indigenous children represent only 4% of all Australian children.

The report also provides information on the operation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, showing that 77% of children in out of home care were placed in accordance with the Principle although only 47% were placed with an Indigenous relative. SNAICC intends to investigate and report on each state and territory's compliance with the Principle in more detail during 2004.

Child protection statistics for different states and territories cannot be directly compared because of different child protection policies and practices, but the figures provided by the AIHW provide a picture of the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection statistics in every jurisdiction. In Victoria, for example, Indigenous children were more than ten times more likely to be the subject of a child protection substantiation.

The over-representation of Indigenous children in the child protection statistics requires urgent action by all states and territories. Governments, in close consultation with Indigenous communities must strive to better understand the picture painted by the statistics, urgently develop specific policy objectives with regard to Indigenous children and families and allocate the resources needed to keep all Indigenous children safe and well-cared-for within their families and communities.

A summary of the national statistics is included with this newsletter. Similar tables for each state and territory have been prepared by SNAICC and are available on the SNAICC web site (www.snaicc.asn.au) or by calling (03) 9482 9380. A full copy of the AIHW report is available on the Institute's web site www.aihw.gov.au.

Australia: 2002-2003 Child Protection Statistics for Indigenous Children

	Indig.	Other	Total	Rate per 1,000 children		Ratio of Indig. to Other
				Indig.	Other	
Total Children 0-17*	187,642	4,525,537	4,713,179			
% Total Children 0-17	4.0%	96.0%	100.0%			
Children 0-17 on care and protection orders at 30 June 2003**	4,803	17,327	22,130	23.1	3.8	6.1 to 1
% Children 0-17 on care and protection orders at 30 June 2003	21.7%	78.3%	100.0%			
Children 0-17 in out-of-home care at 30 June 2003#	4,750	15,547	20,297	22.8	3.4	6.7 to 1
% Children 0-17 in out-of-home care at 30 June 2003	23.4%	76.6%	100.0%			

Indigenous Placements##:

(a) Placed with Indigenous relative/kin	47%
(b) Placed with other Indigenous care giver	20%
(c) Placed with other Australian relative/kin	
(d) Placed in Indigenous residential care	
Total placed in accordance with Aboriginal Child Placement Principle	77%

*Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census of Population and Housing

**Child Protection Australia 2002-03, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004 Table 3.10 Page 36

#Child Protection Australia 2002-03, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004 Table 4.8 Page 46

##Child Protection Australia 2002-03, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004 Table 4.9 Page 48

Prepared by

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www.snaicc.asn.au

SNAICC Capacity Building Project

The SNAICC Capacity Building Project commenced early January 2004, before moving into this position I have worked in various community organisations in Western Australia ranging from a Community Trainee Radio Broadcaster to Managing a Women's Refuge Centre.

Since moving from Western Australia about 4 years ago, I took on the position as Manager of Yappera Children's Services, there I have been employed for the past 2 1/2 years. Whilst managing Yappera Children's Services I was faced with many challenges such as Management, Recruiting of Qualified staff members and keeping updated with all the regulations.

When I moved into the Capacity Building Project with SNAICC I found it totally different to managing a MACS, but I was able to understand the difficulties most of the services are experiencing.

The Project has been funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services as part of their commitment to support the effectiveness of Indigenous, non-government agencies working directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. In particular agencies operating in the early childhood development and child and family welfare fields.

The overall aim of the project is to provide direct assistance to Indigenous agencies working in the early childhood development and child and family welfare field by supporting them to extend good practice within their ongoing work. This will include supporting them with issues relating to governance and service management as well as issues relating to service practice and developing new models of service delivery.

The overall goals of the project are:

1. To assist existing Indigenous services, particular Indigenous child and family welfare services and Indigenous early childhood services, to strengthen and extend their service provision for children and families at a local level.

2. To support Indigenous child and family welfare and Indigenous early childhood services to develop a united approach in addressing the needs of Indigenous children and families at a State, Territory and National level.
3. To further S.N.A.I.C.C's role and capacity to provide practical support to existing and emerging Indigenous child and family welfare and Indigenous early childhood services.
4. Produce a National Resource Directory which may include information on;
 - Key stages in early childhood development
 - Current theoretical understandings and debate around early childhood development.
 - Prevention and early intervention strategies
 - Community based approaches to prevention of child abuse and neglect.
 - Good Governance
 - Financial and administrative management practices etc.

If any of the Services have any relevant information or resources that would be useful for the project, please feel free to give me a call, email or even send something through the post.

Thankyou

Cecilia Gore-Birch
Capacity Building Project Officer
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e-mail: cecilia@snaicc.asn.au

Upcoming Events

Conferences

ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect

19-22 September 2004

Brisbane, QLD

For full instructions log onto www.congress2004.com

Families Australia

Globalisation, Families & Work Conference

1-2 April 2004-03-11 Brisbane QLD Australia

Ph: (02) 6273 4885

Building better Boards

31 July-1 August

Sydney Australia

For further info contact:

Nonprofit governance & Management Centre

PO Box 246, Gladesville NSW 2111, Australia

Ph: 02 9879 6674 Fax: 02 9879 6029

'Knowledge into Action! Effective Practice for Child and Family Services'

2-4 August 2004

ACWA 2004 Conference C/- PO Box 4023 Pitt town

NSW 2756

PH (02) 4572 3079

FAX (02) 4572 3972

E mail:acwa2004@mob.com.au

Inquiries: Sharyn Low - Conference Organiser

National FACE to Face Forum

Extended Family & Kinship Care

28 to 29 April 2004 Melbourne

Contact: Sharyn Low from Matrix On board

Tel (02) 4572 3079

Fax (02) 4572 3972

8th Australian Conference on Adoption Adelaide 2004

Adelaide Hilton 19-21 April 2004

PO Box 54, Burnside South Australia 5066

Tel: (08) 8379 8222

Fax: (08) 8379 8177

National Foster Care Conference

29-31 October 2004

Rydges Lakeside

Canberra ACT

Email: conf2004@bigpond.com

18th World Conference on Health Promotion and Health Education

Valuing Diversity, Reshaping Power: Exploring Pathways for Health and Well-Being

April 25-29 2004 Melbourne

Contact: Conference Manager

Tel: 03 9667 1313 Web: .com.au

www.health2004.com.au

National Services for Australian Rural and remote Allied Health Conference

August 26-28, 2004 Alice Springs

Contact: the 2004 National SARRAH Conference

C/-National Rural Health Alliance PO Box 280

Deakin West ACT 2600

The 6th International Diabetes Conference on Indigenous People - Dreaming Together Experience

September 1-4, 2004 Cairns

Contact: Conference Secretariat, Indigenous

Conference Services Australia, PO Box 152 Emu Park QLD 4710

Tel: 074938 7558

Email: NK <mailto:icsa2@bigpond.com>

icsa2@bigpond.com

Infant, Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Gold Coast, QLD

September 2004

Further information: Web:

www.aicafmha.net.au/conferences/goldcoast2004/index.html

Fifth National Intensive Family Services Practice Symposium

31 March to 2 April 2004

Swiss Grand Hotel Bondi Beach Sydney

Further Information: Sharyn Low,

sharyn@mob.com.au

Tel: 02 4572 3079

ACOSS National Congress 2004

28-29 October 2004

Alice Springs Convention Centre

Enquiries: gill@acoss.org.au