



SNAICC NEWS

Stop the abuse of our children's culture

By Muriel Bamblett, AM
CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency,
Chairperson of SNAICC

Imagine how you would feel if every time you opened the newspaper your culture was denigrated and attacked. Imagine how you would respond if your self-esteem was constantly maimed and abused. When I read attacks on my Aboriginal culture, my soul is sickened at the very root.

When the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated, or worse, intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse. It is abuse because it strikes at the very identity of the people it is aimed at; it attacks their sense of self, it attacks their connectedness to their family and community.

“When the culture of a people is ignored, denigrated, or worse, intentionally attacked, it is cultural abuse.”

The culturally abusive Stolen Generations episode was a specific racist and colonial practice which sought to ‘whiten’ and remove Indigenous peoples from the landscape of Australia via assimilation. It is estimated that tens of thousands of Indigenous children were removed from their families and raised in institutions or fostered-out to non-

Indigenous parents. Its impact continues to disrupt our families. It is one of the causes of family breakdown.

But what do I keep reading in the newspapers, seeing on the television and hearing on the radio? That the problem is my culture. That my culture sanctions child abuse. That my culture impairs my grandchildren's education. These lies peddled by the popular ideologues of the right, taken as authoritative by fly-by-night journalists and some naïve politicians, are abusing my grandchildren. They are abusing me.

It is ironic that these attacks on Indigenous culture are happening as we celebrate Reconciliation Week. In the hands of the current Federal Government reconciliation has become ‘practical reconciliation’ and by ‘practical reconciliation’ it means ‘practical assimilation’. We are being told that if we want the same services as the rest of the population we will need to wash our faces until all the blackness, all the culture, is washed away.

The background noise of those who seek assimilation should be ignored. As one of your poets once said, it is “sound and fury, signifying nothing.” It is Aboriginal experts who need to be heard.

Indigenous Child and Adolescent psychiatrist, Dr. Helen Milroy has made the following observation arising from her



Photo © SNAICC 2002

research in Western Australia:

I observe many psychological strengths even in some of the most traumatised children. These include children's sense of autonomy early in life, their ability to understand psychological issues, their capacity for humour and their general creativity and playfulness evident in their love of drama, art and imagery. They have a strong sense of commitment to their siblings and family.

The very fact that Aboriginal peoples are the oldest living culture and have survived the impact of colonisation is testimony to their resilience and the elders must have passed this on to the children of today.

Judy Atkinson, Professor of Indigenous Australian Studies at Southern Cross University, talks of the need to re-create song lines in order to enable healing for our

continued on page 3 ►

Also in this edition:



EDITORIAL
Keeping our
children safe

page 2



National Aboriginal
& Islander Children's
Day

page 4



SNAICC Resource
Service update

page 6



Traditional
Aboriginal healing
in Alice Springs

page 9



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Contributions, feedback and suggestions to *SNAICC News* are welcome. Copy deadline for our October edition is **20 September 2006**.

For publication inquiries, contact:
Mark Lawrence
Publications Officer
Email: publicatons@snaicc.asn.au
Telephone: (03) 9489 8099

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For subscription inquiries, contact:
Angelique Davis
Email: admin@snaicc.asn.au
Telephone: (03) 9489 8099
SNAICC, 252–260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy, Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.asn.au

EDITORIAL

Keeping our children safe from harm

Recent media 'revelations' of a crisis of family violence, and abuse and neglect of children in Aboriginal communities were not news to SNAICC or our members. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is six times more likely to be in the child protection system than a non-Aboriginal child but four times less likely to have access to a Commonwealth, state or territory funded child care or pre-school service. This simple fact says a lot about what is and isn't happening for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC welcomed the media focus on child abuse and neglect, although, of course, we did not always agree with the way issues were reported or some ideas put forward. We supported the proposed national summit called by the Australian Government Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Mal Brough MP, as a step towards the development of a national response.

We urged state and territory governments to accept the invitation to attend the summit and to insist that the Commonwealth negotiate the development of a 'National action plan to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' with the States and Territories after appropriate consultation with SNAICC and other Indigenous organisations.

In SNAICC's view, the summit would have been a wasted opportunity if it did not lead to the development of a National Plan.

Furthermore, we recommended that the summit should also lead to a National Indigenous children's well being and development taskforce being convened to develop a package of measures for consideration at the next COAG (Council of Australian Governments) meeting. Such a taskforce must include representation from all governments and SNAICC, be retained as ongoing, and report directly to COAG to oversee implementation of

the package and the development of any additional measures beyond the initial package.

SNAICC has consistently put forward our views to governments on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should be supported and abuse and neglect prevented and responded to. We reiterated these to state and territory leaders in the context of the recent media focus on the issues in a SNAICC briefing paper to all state and territory governments.

We also held direct discussions with Minister Brough and his office, released a media statement on 17 May 2006, and liaised widely with representatives of other Indigenous community organisations across the country to ensure they were aware of SNAICC's position on these matters.

"In SNAICC's view, the ministerial summit would have been a wasted opportunity if it did not lead to the development of a National Plan."

We made it clear that all governments should be maximising effort and increasing services and programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ways that:

- Improve access to Indigenous community based early childhood, child care, family support and child welfare programs;
- Ensure the appropriate levels and forms of policing within communities are in place to enable people to speak out against violence and abuse without placing their own safety at risk;
- Ensure child protection systems are well resourced to respond when called upon to properly investigate and intervene where children are at risk of abuse or neglect;

Editorial continued

- Focus interventions on removing the risk and perpetrators from children rather than children from their families and communities;
- Maintain children's rights to be connected with their extended family and community and their cultural and spiritual heritage;
- Recognise and build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and kinship systems;
- Include SNAICC as the national peak body as well as recognised local Aboriginal organisations.

There was a danger that the recent media frenzy on these issues in Aboriginal communities would descend to 'blame' being placed with Indigenous communities and Indigenous culture, that governments would escape attention on their responsibilities for this issue, and ill-considered, knee-jerk responses would be proposed as 'solutions'.

As SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett insisted, however, there must be a "national approach to child welfare that deals with the immediate issues of violence and abuse in a way that build on the strengths of Aboriginal families and Aboriginal culture while working to prevent the abuse from re-occurring in the next generation."

SNAICC has been calling for this for over 20 years. Let's ensure it doesn't take another 20 years before something is done.

Resources

SNAICC has published a web-page of resources and links to assist services in preparing responses to, and dealing with, child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. That page is available on SNAICC's website here:

http://www.snaicc.asn.au/resource/fv_resources.html

SNAICC's briefing paper for state and territory governments, 'Development of a National Action Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect', is available on our website here:

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news/briefing-papers.html>

SNAICC's media statement of 17 May 2006, calling for a national strategy to deal with child abuse and prevention, is available for download from our website here:

<http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news/media.html> ■

continued from page 1

Stop the abuse of our children's culture

people. The experience of my people has been traumatic as it has involved a series of disconnections – from the land, from our spiritual ancestors, from our culture and, for many of us, from our families. By building on the resilience of our Indigenous cultures we can develop resilience for our Indigenous kids.

"We need to tell our Indigenous kids that they are valued and loved and that their culture is valued and respected."

Our children live in a hybrid world which is both Indigenous and post-invasion Australian. Sometimes our families aren't safe for children because they have learned to be helpless or they have internalised the trauma of two hundred years of oppression to such an extent that they take it out on their kids. And much of the time the rest of Australian society is unsafe for our children because it talks down to them, discriminates against them and tells them they are from a defeated people.

But we need to fight that despair. We need to tell our Indigenous kids that they are valued and loved and that their culture is valued and respected. The best protection we can offer any child is to give them a sense of belonging. Culture can provide that sense of belonging and through that belonging, resilience.



Photo © SNAICC 2002

The non-Indigenous community appears to be suffering from collective amnesia – read your own reports, particularly the *Deaths in Custody Report* and the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Now that there is a vast evidence base which tells us assimilation is demonstrably harmful to my people any resurgence of assimilation policy is clearly, intentionally genocidal. Please stop the abuse of our children's culture – it is killing us, it is genocide.

This piece was originally published in *The Age* for Reconciliation Week, and has been republished here with permission from Muriel Bamblett.

© Muriel Bamblett 2006

2007 SNAICC National Conference 'For Our Children'

**Please mark your diaries! SNAICC will be holding a
National Conference in 2007**

City: Adelaide

Venue: Adelaide Convention Centre

Dates: 19, 20, 21 of September 2007

Further details will be made available on the SNAICC website and sent to all SNAICC News subscribers by the end of this year. Contact Carmen or Julie at SNAICC for more information.

SNAICC Update

National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day 4 August 2006

On this year's National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day (NAICD), held on 4 August, SNAICC urged all its members and subscribers to celebrate children and culture with strength, pride and confidence.

This year, SNAICC chose a theme that emphasises the positive influence of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child's culture on their well being: 'My Culture is Me: I am Proud and Strong.' SNAICC knows that culture makes children, strong, proud and confident.

Kids need to know their culture. Children who are cut-off from their culture are being denied their rights as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It was great to see this year's theme for National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day, 'My Culture is Me: I'm proud and strong', resonate strongly throughout communities across the country

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child must be given the opportunity to allow their culture and spirituality to develop and emerge during their childhood as cultural identity and a sense of belonging can guide and protect them through adolescence and adulthood.

SNAICC members and subscribers received our posters and related material for NAICD in the mail. This year, we used positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for our annual NAICD poster — we wanted to show our children being proud and strong, and celebrating their culture.

We wish to thank all the services who responded to our call (from our April newsletter) for photographs of children and their families to be used in our Children's



© Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre MACS



Left & far left © Dalaigur Pre-school 2006

Day material. This year, we were proud to publish photographs from Undoonoo Child Care Centre (Queensland) and Aboriginal Children's Service (Tasmania), and from photographer Kenny Bedford.

In knowing their culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will also know themselves — culture is inseparable from identity.

As SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett says in her opinion piece republished in this edition of the newsletter: "We need to tell our Indigenous kids that they are valued and loved and that their culture is valued and respected. The best protection we can offer any child is to give them a sense of belonging. Culture can provide that sense of belonging and through that belonging, resilience."

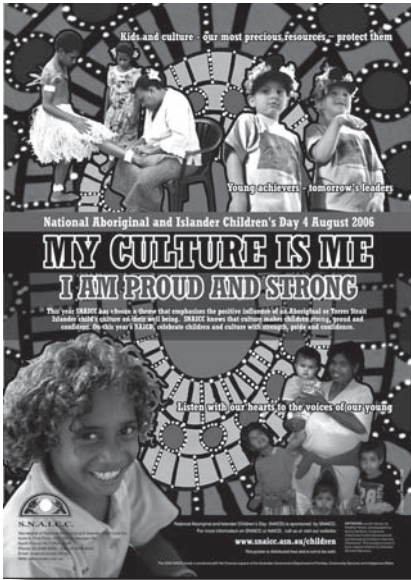
SNAICC is pleased with the level of participation in NAICD this year — many organisations held an event — however small — in their service, child care centre, kinder, pre-school, health service or community group. Some of the events that were held nationally were: on the Gold

Top: James Webb from Wadumah played the didgeridoo for the children and danced with them at the Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre MACS (WA) NAICD celebration
Above left: Dalaigur Pre-school (NSW) had a great day, with Uncle Wil teaching the children tradition Koori art on boomerangs and then how to throw them. He also told stories of family tree lines and recommended a trip through the bush to some cultural heritage sites
Above right: Aunty Lizzi painted Dalaigur Pre-school's Billabong, telling the story of significant tribal towns and the journey from the mountain to the sea

Coast 600 children gathered and enjoyed cultural activities, Aboriginal dancers, wildlife talks and exhibits; in Hobart kids enjoyed traditional foods, including mutton bird, at a children's cultural activity day; while in Port Adelaide the children's services held a 'stay and play day' at the child care centre for the parents and their kids.

NAICD is certainly something to focus on each year to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This year, SNAICC also published an NAICD Children's Activity Kit containing culturally relevant activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This kit was made available to Indigenous



SNAICC's National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day poster for this year featured positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being strong and proud of their culture.

children's services to use as part of NAICD celebrations. The activities allow children the chance to express their pride in their culture and themselves.

The activity kit drew a lot of attention and interest. SNAICC received a lot of requests for activity kits from Indigenous and non-Indigenous services. In Victoria the state government announced available funding to child care services that have attendance of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Children. This funding was as a result of the activity kits and was for the services to run activities on children's day.

SNAICC also featured Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's artwork as part of our 2006 NAICD celebrations. We invited nearly 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services to send us artwork by children addressing this year's NAICD theme. Thank you to all those who responded to the invitation.

A selection of this artwork was published on our website on Children's Day. You can view the children's artwork on SNAICC's website at:

www.snaicc.asn.au/children/

An evaluation sheet was posted to services as part of the NAICD mailout. The evaluation sheet enables SNAICC members to have their say and share ideas for future NAICD resources and topics.

The response from SNAICC's members was excellent. The information gathered from the evaluation will be extremely helpful for future Children's Day topics, resources and events. Thanks to all of our members for talking the time out of your busy schedules to participate in the evaluation process.

by **Carmen Isherwood & Mark Lawrence**



SNAICC National Executive Meeting

Last July, the SNAICC National Executive held its third meeting for the year at SNAICC's office in Melbourne.

At its three-day meeting, the Executive approved the organisation's budget for the 2006–2007 financial year, and made some adjustments to the management and organisational structure of the SNAICC staff team to include three new management positions.

They also endorsed the SNAICC Strategic Plan for 2007–2009 (which will be published for the Annual General Meeting in November), amongst other things.

The Executive also decided to name the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Service as the 'SNAICC Resource Service' or SRS.

You can find out more about this and other decisions they made regarding the

Some of the members of the SNAICC National Executive met who in Melbourne last July

Top (from left): Debbie Hart (TAIHS—Child Protection, Qld), Kathleen Pinkerton (Yorganop, WA), Ray Burrows (Gundoo Day Care, Qld), Desley Thompson (RAATSICC, Qld), and Ian Davidson (AFSS, SA)

Below left (from left): Kate Lindsay (AbSec, NSW) and SNAICC Deputy Chair Garry Matthews (Coffs Harbour AFCCC, NSW). **Below right** (from left): Geraldine Atkinson (VAEAI, Vic), Lisa Coulson (TACCA, Tas).

SNAICC Resource Service in the 'SRS Update' on page 6 of this newsletter.

The National Executive meeting also gave the opportunity for the representatives to report on key needs and concerns each state or territory is facing in the areas of child and family welfare and early childhood, and other issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This discussion also allows the Executive to map out future directions for SNAICC policy and plan initiatives.

The National Executive will next meet this September in Melbourne.

For more information about SNAICC'S National Executive meetings, contact the SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock.

– **Mark Lawrence**

Introducing the SNAICC Resource Service

At its July meeting, the SNAICC National Executive unanimously passed a resolution to name the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Service the SNAICC Resource Service or 'SRS'!

It was a long and windy track to get to the name but we believe the name, SNAICC Resource Service, describes and locates the service.

The SNAICC Resource Service is now moving ahead with developing the publicity about the service and getting this out to communities and relevant government departments. Some of our members have also put words and phrases forward that describe what the SRS does and we will incorporate them into the publicity resources. We thank people for these suggestions. The publicity resources currently in development include:

- A poster
- A pamphlet
- A web-page

Look out for these and let us know if you think the publicity hits the mark. If there are any questions or suggestions you think we need to include in further publicity about the service, let us know. We'd appreciate your comments.

SRS Update

Governance and management

The SRS staff team work under the SNAICC Executive Officer to a reference group with people from the SNAICC national executive, the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and two other government representatives who report to government committees – the Children's Services Committee and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group.

The SRS Reference Group and SNAICC Executive recently approved a process for inviting greater participation from SNAICC Executive Members to join SRS Project Working Groups.

SRS Project Working Groups

These Working Groups will oversee and guide the SRS projects. A list of the SRS projects and working groups is on the SRS page of the SNAICC website.

Staffing

Since the last newsletter we have welcomed Veronica Johns and Tatiana Doroshenko to the SRS team. See page 8 for more of an introduction to our new colleagues.

Clearinghouse and website

A Family Violence Resources page which highlights current resources and services has been developed and posted onto the SNAICC website. This will be maintained and updated by the Clearinghouse Officer, Tatiana Doreshenko. Please send any updates or additional items to project5@snaicc.asn.au

Preventing Violence, Abuse and Neglect

Through Young Black Eyes (TYBE)

The updated handbook, leaflet and booklet can be downloaded electronically from our website, or printed copies ordered from us.

As part of the evaluation we are distributing a feedback survey to all services who have already received the publication. Please send it back to us.

Community workshops

SNAICC is planning to refine the TYBE workshop strategy and a facilitators guide that accompanies the TYBE handbook. This work is due to be completed in 2006.

Child and Family Well Being

Resource tools to support family centred strengths based practice

One of the SRS projects is to produce strength based tools for services to utilise. Two project officers, Michele Moloney and Veronica Johns, recently purchased some resources from Family Action Centre at Newcastle University and St Luke's in Bendigo.

These resources will be sent to a number of services who volunteer to trial them. Their feedback will then inform the development of culturally appropriate resources that will be distributed more widely.

Child rearing practices

A project proposal about how to gather, document and share information for this overarching project activity will be



One of the National Parenting and Men posters the SRS produced. They were launched in Tasmania in August. © SNAICC 2005

developed at a workshop later this year. Recommendations about how to implement this project will be forwarded to the SRS reference group and SNAICC Executive.

Promising practices

Nikki Butler is the project worker on this project to profile promising practice projects and services in the area of out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We are undertaking this project in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Early Childhood Development and Parenting

Parenting and men posters

A series of posters has been produced depicting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in positive images with their children/nieces/nephews and grandchildren. The national launch was in Tasmania on 24 August. The national distribution of the posters followed the launch, with copies mailed to all SNAICC members and subscribers.

Five sets of local posters have also been produced. Those local areas are Tiwi, Yarrabah, Alice Springs, Wreck Bay and Tasmania. A template and facilitators guide have also been produced which will be placed on SNAICC's website and can be downloaded for other local communities to produce their own posters in the future. (See SNAICC's media statement on the posters on page 8.)

Parenting website – Raising Children Network (RCN)

SNAICC Executive Officer Julian Pocock has been participating on the advisory group of the new Australian Government sponsored parenting website and we are exploring posting links to the SRS resources on the site. SNAICC has made a commitment to work with the RCN to develop content for the site.

Dreaming Resource – Stage Two: Aboriginal stories for early childhood mainstream services

This project is being undertaken in partnership with Early Childhood Australia (ECA). ECA has contracted Jenni Connor, a writer-researcher, to work with SRS Project Officer Veronica Johns to prepare the evidence based Research In Practice book to accompany a DVD of Aboriginal stories. It is expected that this resource will be ready to be sent out to ECA's Research in Practice mailing list (2,400) in March of 2007.

ATSI Governance and Organisational Development

Management Support Online (MSO)

The MSO project will provide access for approximately two hundred early childhood and child and family welfare services to a comprehensive set of management tools that are easily accessed through the internet. An informative presentation to the SRS Reference Group in May by the Bradfield Nyland Group (BNG) was well received. A working group has also been established to support and monitor the roll-out of this project.

The SNAICC National Executive members are participating in a pilot and recording feedback about the MSO site for one month. This will assist Bradfield Nyland to better tailor the site to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audience and scope the resource needs for our sectors. A detailed description of this project will be provided in the next newsletter so stay tuned! We have also received complimentary copies of the South Australian Care and Education Forum policy development guidelines/resource which we will review and consider for putting online.

Evaluation project

This project aims to enhance research and evaluation skills of workers and or/board members of children's and child and family

welfare services. It aims to facilitate the delivery of accredited training in capacity building modules alongside the gathering of data for the overall SRS evaluation. A partnership with the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia to pilot this approach is currently being developed and an important outcome will be the development of accessible and useful evaluation tools that services can apply to a variety of programs.

Early childhood communication online (ECCO)

The SRS ECCO Project will include:

1. An audit of communication technologies in early childhood services (about 50 plus), identifying what's working/not working, developing a plan of what's needed to set up and support effective/efficient systems,
2. Providing some of the technologies, with training and support to use them,
3. Establishing ongoing networking and information sharing through the SNAICC website.

The SNAICC Executive Officer has participated in two preliminary meetings with PSUs and IPSUs and with the appointment of Project Officer Veronica Johns, the project planning to consult with 30 Indigenous child care services has begun. A working group is being organised to support and guide this project.

SRS external evaluation

As reported in the last newsletter, the SRS is being evaluated by an external evaluation team. The final Evaluation Plan has been developed by the consultants and written feedback and surveys are in place for all the resource product projects. Some services will be approached about participating in case studies for the evaluation. The first review report was submitted to the reference group by the evaluation team in August 2006. We will give an update about the first report in the next newsletter.

That's it for now from us at the SRS Team.

Liz Orr: project2@snaicc.asn.au

Veronica Johns: project7@snaicc.asn.au

Michelle Maloney:

project1@snaicc.asn.au

Nikki Butler: project6@snaicc.asn.au

Tatiana Doreshenko: project5@snaicc.asn.au

Information on SRS projects can be found on SNAICC's website at:

www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/index.html



Photo © David Vadiveloo

Film maker David Vadiveloo, who grew up in Alice Springs, was also a human rights lawyer with the Central Lands Council

Visitor to SNAICC

Award winning film maker and new media producer David Vadiveloo visited us in July to talk to SNAICC staff about the highly successful online story series *UsMob*.

Set in 'Hidden Valley' in Central Australia, *UsMob* features four young Aboriginal characters, and allows their experiences and friendships to spark an exchange of culture, creativity and experience between non-Indigenous and Indigenous young people.

UsMob consists of seven web-based film episodes as well as a range of other online resources and avenues for interaction. It has been highly successful amongst young people, especially young Aboriginal people and children in Central Australia who have been taking to the digital medium in droves due to *UsMob's* appeal.

David offered some lovely insights into his amazing film-making methodology, which involved close collaboration with the local Aboriginal community and leadership from the traditional owners of Alice Springs.

He also told us about a number of other multimedia and film-making projects involving young people in Australia and elsewhere that he is working on.

SNAICC is proud to support initiatives like David's that provide young Australians, especially young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the chance to be part of digital culture and self-expression.

David's previous work includes *Beyond Sorry*, a documentary film about the Stolen Generations, and the short film *Bush Bikes*.

To participate in the *UsMob* digital stories experience, go to:

<http://www.usmob.com.au>

For more information about David Vadiveloo, see <http://www.realtimearts.net/rt63/ofarrell.html>

– ML

Welcome to new SNAICC staff

SNAICC continues to grow and grow! Tatiana Doroshenko joined us mid-April and Veronica Johns moved down from Darwin to join us in May, to work with the SNAICC Resource Service team.

Tatiana



© SNAICC 2006

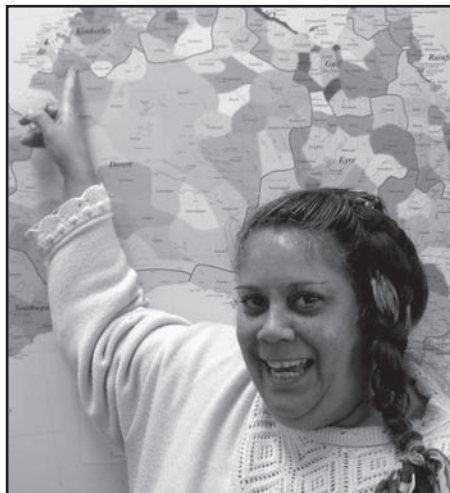
Hi, my name is Tatiana Doroshenko. SNAICC has employed me as the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) Clearinghouse Officer, which will see me develop the online content and interactivity for the SRS web presence. I will also be assisting with the gathering and organisation of materials and resources that demonstrate Best Practice across the four priority areas of the SRS.

I arrived more or less at the end of a contract as an electronic information officer with the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, a clearinghouse attached to the Institute of Family Studies. I have also worked on a number of internet websites, and I make films of various shapes and sizes when I can create the opportunity.

At tertiary level I studied psychology, visual arts and women's studies. My areas of interest included child development, children's rights, sexual assault and censorship with some research into violence against women in Indigenous communities. I also have a diploma in film and TV (VCA).

My experience and knowledge of Indigenous culture, though always growing, leans towards the arts, especially filmmaking and theatre. ●

Veronica



Hi everyone! I'd like to introduce myself as a new staff member of SNAICC. I have been employed as Project Officer with the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) on a contract basis till 2008. My name is Veronica Johns or, if you like, I'm happy for you to call me VJ.

I am married with three adult children who have left home and are doing their own thing. My husband, our dog 'Bilby' and I made this big move from Darwin to Melbourne in May this year. We have never lived in a big city like this before so this is certainly something very new for us.

The opportunity to come to SNAICC and be involved in the work through the Resource Service was something worth reaching out for and now to be a part of. I look forward to bringing my experiences and networks gained and developed over the past 20 years in children's services to this national arena.

I'd like to thank all of you out there who I know personally and professionally for contributing to who I am today and who have worked with, assisted and supported me along my learning journey.

I look forward now to continuing our relationship and in particular developing and strengthening new links and new ways of working in the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. ●

Note: Veronica is pointing to where on the map her mob, the Nyikina, come from – i.e. the Kimberley.

Men and parenting posters now available

SNAICC and the Aboriginal Children's Centre in Tasmania launched a series of national and local posters that highlight the positive role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in raising children in Hobart on Thursday 24 August.

The posters feature Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men with the children in their families. The posters were developed with local communities in Hobart in Tasmania, Wreck Bay in the ACT, Bathurst Island and Alice Springs in Northern Territory and Yarrabah in Queensland.

The five national posters are available free from SNAICC. You can view them and learn more on the project on the SNAICC Resource Service web page at www.snaicc.asn.au

SNAICC Chairperson, Muriel Bamblett, said, "SNAICC was delighted to work with the Aboriginal Children's Centre in Hobart to highlight how Aboriginal men play such a positive role in raising children."

She added, "we hear plenty through the mainstream media about the problems Aboriginal communities experience and not enough about the wonderful men in communities who have such a positive influence on the lives of young children. Nowhere was this more striking than at the Aboriginal Children's Centre in Hobart".

Alison Overeem, Coordinator of the Centre said, "Our children's centre would never be complete without the active involvement of men from our community. Children need strong, positive and nurturing male role models in their lives to guide and support them on life's journey".

She added, "these posters celebrate the role of men in raising children and encourage men to spend time with kids, enjoy the challenge of raising children and pass onto children their wisdom and experience."

The posters are part of a project developed by the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) in partnership with the Family Action Centre at The University of Newcastle, with funding from FaCSIA.

SNAICC encourages community services and other groups to display the national posters in their waiting rooms, in meeting places, at child care centres and kindergartens, and in their shop front windows.

– From SNAICC's Media Release 23 August 2006

View the posters online:
www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/index.html

Akeyulerre Apmere Cultural Healing Centre

By Julie Higgins,
SNAICC Policy Manager

The traditional healing practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have never stopped despite the colonisation of their lands and the introduction of western medicine.

Kathy Abbott spent over 30 years as an Aboriginal Health Worker in Central Australia and recognised the need for traditional practices to be brought to the fore. The problems of town camps and communities in and around Alice Springs that have been the focus of media attention in recent months have only strengthened Kathy's resolve that there is one clear need above all others: the need for healing that incorporates traditional approaches.

She thought for a long time about the need for a centre that would provide and broker access to a range of traditional healing practices and approaches. Her vision was for a place that would be chosen and planned with the traditional owners of the area.

Kathy now runs Akeyulerre Apmere Cultural Healing Centre in Alice Springs. The Centre's model is a service where Aboriginal cultural knowledge, traditions and practices relating to health and healing are used to address the chronic health and social problems being faced by communities today.

Services are provided in central and eastern Arernte as well as English and include nutrition (including bush foods); traditional Aboriginal healers (Ngangkari); smoking ceremonies; hospital visits (including smoking hospital rooms); healing



Above: Kathy Abbott's vision for Akeyulerre Apmere is for traditional Aboriginal healing to become part of the solution to the Alice Springs communities' problems. **Below:** SNAICC Project Officer Michele Moloney (left) with Kathy, during Michele's and Julie's visit in April this year. Photos by Julie Higgins © Julie Higgins 2006

visits to country; healing stories; individual and group counselling (at the Centre, at schools and the gaol); bush medicines (growing, collecting, preparing and administering); training Western doctors and brokering access to Western health services.

“For Kathy, there is one clear need above all others: the need for healing that incorporates traditional approaches.”

Kathy is some steps along the way towards achieving her vision for Akeyulerre Apmere. The Centre is established in a small house that people come to for counselling, smoking ceremonies and access to Ngangkari. Kathy provides cultural services to people in the hospital, individual and group counselling, and runs Family Well Being training for young Aboriginal men in Alice Springs gaol. Kathy runs this in her own way, talking to the men and boys as an Aboriginal mother, auntie and grandmother and incorporating traditional cultural approaches into the program with great success.

She runs family violence workshops and train-the-trainer workshops in family violence, child abuse and family well being. Funding for these is on a one-off basis and from various sources.

Kathy is also sought by government for occasional short-term work. At present she is in discussions with the Northern

Territory Government which would like the Centre to assist mental health clients.

The Centre has real potential to provide an enormous contribution to the health and well being of the communities in and around Alice Springs. Indeed Kathy's vision is that Akeyulerre Apmere could one day become a resource that Indigenous people and medical professionals and students from across Australia and the world could access for information about traditional Aboriginal medicines, healing and healers.

At present, however, Akeyulerre Apmere is still very small and its funding is insecure. Some of its plans have yet to take form due to lack of funding and support, although the foundations have been laid and much good work is being done by Kathy and her small team.

We have heard politicians calling for a 're-think' in the face of what seems like intractable problems in some Aboriginal communities that are not responding to the usual approaches. It is also time for a change of heart, and for making room for ancient healing wisdoms to have a role in the lives of communities struggling with ill-health, grief, substance abuse and violence.

Akeyulerre Apmere needs stable long term funding to demonstrate it can make a real difference to the lives of families and children beyond the very small numbers it can currently reach.

If you can put the Centre in touch with any sources of government or private funding that may be available to secure its future, please contact me or Michele Moloney at SNAICC.



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First Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers Conference

by Nikki Butler,
SNAICC Project Officer



On Saturday 3 June and Sunday 4 June, I attended the First National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers Conference in Canberra. The conference was an initiative of the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers Inc. and had been in the pipe-line for some time. The conference theme was 'Raising the Standard and Vision: The Voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers.'

An initial aim of forming such an important coalition was to bring together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers to share information and ideas to enhance the communities in which we live and work.

The conference was successful in achieving this aim. As an Indigenous social worker, I was empowered to meet and liaise with a number of knowledgeable and influential Indigenous social workers from various States and Territories.

The conference programme provided participants with valuable insight into both past achievements and current programs and research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers are engaged in.

As a project officer with SNAICC, I found the conference provided me with useful information surrounding the issues of child abuse and family violence that are

From left: Candice Butler – Social worker at Centrelink Townsville, Nikki Butler – Project Officer at SNAICC, and Nola D'Antoine – Research Assistant at the Centre for Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health, The University of Western Australia

currently getting intense media attention. It was motivating to hear others' views on the issues, and to share in their knowledge and contributions.

I would like to congratulate the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers for their triumph in organising such a conference. I believe 'Raising the Standard and Vision: The Voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers' can be marked down in history as an important milestone for future endeavours of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers in this country.

I cannot stress the importance, the value and the knowledge I gained just from being present at this conference, and I hope to attend a subsequent conference in 2007. ●

Learn more about the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Workers from their website at: <http://www.atsisw.org/>