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Appendix I

Interview No. 1 - ISOBEL COE

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S SERVICE

How long have you been involved in Aboriginal Children and Family Services and issues?

Since the starting of the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1971.

You started off with the Legal Service but you set up an Aboriginal Children's Service. Why was that?

That was how the need for the Aboriginal Children's Service came about. It grew out of the Aboriginal Legal Service. We were finding there were a number of people coming to the Legal Service who had just come out of institutions and had nowhere to go. They came to the Aboriginal Legal Service looking for some answers. That is how the Aboriginal Children's Services came about. We eventually set up the Aboriginal Children's Services in 1975.

What were some of the original principles when you set it up?

At the time it was mainly just to look after Aboriginal kids. It was a new area. Nothing had been established. There was no Aboriginal child placement principle. It was something we knew we had to do. All the statistics coming out of the Legal Service verified that in relation to kids and families. I think that was the first place they operated from. I wasn't involved with the Children's Services at that stage. I was working with the Legal Service in Moree. There was a young boy who had run away from Sydney and he was living in one of the paddocks in Moree and some kids brought him in. He was looking for his parents and I contacted Sydney. That is how I became involved with the Aboriginal Children's Services. I contacted them and they were able to find out who the boy was. We ended up placing him with an Aboriginal family. That was my first involvement with the Aboriginal Children's Services. I was already working with the Aboriginal Legal Service in the country areas. I had gone back to Sydney and then I started working with the Aboriginal Children's Services as an Aboriginal Field Officer. We had to place kids that were coming in - emergency cases. All we had was mainly church homes.

A lot of the kids you were dealing with, were they also kids who were from institutions?

At that stage we didn't know that. Because of the staffing we only had a Field Officer, Secretary and Administrator. We hadn't gotten into the things that AICCA's have come to do over the years. Through trial and error we realised that we had to stop the process of kids being placed in the church homes. We couldn't keep placing Aboriginal kids with non-Aboriginal people for short term or long term because there were so many problems coming out of it. That's when we came up with the idea of the extended family. We based that on our own experiences and that's what we brought into the Aboriginal Children's Services rather than placing kids with white families.

In the late 70's we started talking about national issues that were happening at a national level. There were a lot of kids being taken from state to state, but then we also found out that there were a lot of kids being taken out of the country and the only way we could address this was to

set up SNAICC. We had already got in contact with Mollie Dyer through VACCA and then we started negotiating with VACCA to set up SNAICC, the national body.

I am interested in the kinds of statements you were making at that time. What justifying arguments were you using?

Everything that came about was because of the cases we were dealing with. We didn't realise to the extent that we were dealing with, like third and fourth generation kids had been institutionalised. It just started coming out after we started talking to people. We didn't realise to the extent that it was happening until we started taking statistics.

We had been involved in a few cases where kids were being taken from state to state without the parents knowledge. We also became involved in kids being taken out of the country. We were never set up to fight these issues. They were all bandaid treatments. That's all we could afford to do. When we first started we never had any funds and were working for a $30 food order a week - each of the staff. That was our wages.

What about the impact of the removal policies in NSW?

They were devastating. There was one particular case that horrified me. A young boy I had known, I lived next door to the family at the mission and I used to babysit their kids. One day I came home from school and all those kids were gone. The next time I saw them was when I started work at the Aboriginal Children's Services. The eldest boy was 5 years old. They left one of the eldest boys out of the institution when he turned 18 and he was roaming the streets - he didn't know where to go. They didn't tell him anything - who he was or where he came from. The police arrested him and charged him with vagrancy. They contacted the Aboriginal Children's Services. I was able to tellhim where he came from. He is a man now and he has gone back home and has not left there. Luckily, through the Aboriginal Children's Services, I was able to run into all of the kids and was able to tell them where they came from. I know that they have never addressed any of the problems of being taken away. It has just grown into a vicious circle. Their kids are now going through the same thing.

The state welfare system was set up to deal with children who were neglected or abused. Why is it that kids are so important to the Aboriginal community and why is it any different to white kids being taken from their families, for instance?

The way we were living - we were living on a mission under the welfare. When we were kids we were always told to run and hide when the welfare would be on the mission. Aboriginal people now are faced with the reality of dealing with children who have been institutionalised. That's how is we got all our problems - domestic violence, incest, rape, alcohol abuse and drug abuse. It can be traced back to people who have been institutionalised. What we have been doing is fighting a 200 year war and no-one has gone through any healing process. That's just been a part of the oppression and a part of the racism. We have all come from institutions anyway. What the government did was they rounded all of our people up and put them on reserves. They were institutions because we had white Managers looking after us. They controlled every aspect of our life.

I remember the welfare coming. Everyone on the mission had to have a clean up. They would check the beds and the rooms and everyone's homes, with the Manager. If anyone's house was not up to the welfare's standards that was their excuse to forceably remove their children. There have been a number of cases where people have stood up to the Manager - "Mum Shirl" was the first one that I remember. The Manager said he would take the children. She took them to court

and won but the welfare still took the kids. That was my first recollection of someone standing up to the Manager. The welfare still took the kids. That's how much power the welfare and the Aboriginal Protection Board had over everyone.

The way you see things nowadays and coming to a present day situation, you were saying that all your people were institutionalised.

Yes. Today there seems to be all these problems with then, like domestic violence and directed at the men. I remember as a child growing up there were never any boys on the reserve because they would always be away in institutions. The only boy on our mission who never went to an institution was my brother, Paul Coe. There was always use for the women because they were looking after the kids, but there was never use for the men. Before the white man came to Australia we never had any domestic violence or child abuse and rape. They were things that came about because of white society and the system.

How do you see the child welfare system nowadays?

With the child protection system today, we have now got to right all the wrongs that they have done. That is what the services are basically trying to do. We are not having much success because they keep on incarcerating the kids and men and women. They are locking people up for trivial things. That has been the way with Aboriginal people.

I know for a fact that boys got locked up that were never on the reserves; they got locked up because there was a crime in the town and the police couldn't solve it, so straight away they would go to the reserves for their usual suspects. If that was happening with our reserve, it was happening with all the reserves around NSW.

Do you see the relationship between the child protection system today in terms of the colonial relationship that you were talking about before?

Yes, because of what we have been through. Everything is as a result of what we have been through. The kids that we are dealing with today are the third and fourth generation of kids who have been institutionalised. You have to get to the stage where you can break the cycle. There has to be a healing process. That cannot go on without the land because of Aboriginal spirituality and the connection with the land. That is why the question of sovereignty is so important to us. We have never relinquished our sovereignty to the land. We never will.

Where does the relationship with the land and children come in? Can you explain that?

That is part of Aboriginal history. It has always been that way. Everyone was in touch with the land - it is our religion, it is the way we lived. When white colonisation happened with my people, for instance, they declared martial law. They went out and killed Aboriginal people wherever they came into contact with. It wasn't just shooting us. They actually practiced germ warfare against us, chemical warfare. All of these things didn't succeed so then after they put people on reserves we were still passing on our culture and the language.

By the time white people came to Australia they perfected their colonisation. They weren't going to make the same mistakes that they had made in the other countries, like setting up treaties. The way people have been dispossessed, they deliberately used the kids to control people. If people wouldn't do what the Manager wanted them to do they would go in and forceably remove the children.

Even when our people were fighting the war against the white invasion our men thought they would fight the men, but it wasn't like that. The white men slaughtered women and kids - whoever they came into contact with. The white invasion was like the holocaust for our people back then. They came up against a race of people who had no respect for anyone's language, no respect for women or children. They just killed everyone. Just by the fact that we have survived and are here to tell these stories is a miracle.

With regards to the present child welfare system there are still a lot of Aboriginal kids in NSW going into care and still lobbed into the juvenile justice institutions.

Yes. Juvenile justice is just an offshot of DOCS and YACS. The Aboriginal Protection Board and the Aboriginal Welfare Board were the ones who were originally forceably removing kids. As long as I can remember in our history, they have been the ones doing it. They were deliberately set up to look after Aboriginal people. It has grown into DOCS, which has become a State Welfare Department. It is still the same department and they are still responsible. Anything good that is happening in the community, rather than try and help the organisation, particularly like the Aboriginal Children's Services, rather than put all the resources and money in that, they would prefer to start up a new department to do the very work that we have been doing, like juvenile justice. Juvenile justice's ideas come from the Aboriginal Children's Services. It is just a way of controlling people.

There have been some changes in NSW in terms of legislation.

There is the child placement principle, but the Aboriginal Children's Services don't benefit from it. Some Aboriginal people might benefit from it. The child placement principle in NSW is always open to interpretation by the Magistrate that is sitting. After fighting to bring that child placement principle into being, the Aboriginal Children's Services didn't get any recognition. An organisation like Juvenile Justice, that has only been started up in the last few years, can walk in and get full recognition by the Magistrate and they are recommending to courts that Aboriginal kids in NSW be institutionalised. What they are doing is they are taking parts of our submissions and our ideas and trying to put them into the department and then hope they work. For instance, they have started a bail house and we have been screaming out for a bail house but it was to be a part of a package, like a 5 year plan. They have grabbed the bail house principle and set it up without consulting with anyone in the community and have set it up to fail. They set up a 3 bedroom house in Redfern, which is the biggest urban population in Australia and put in house parents and hope that it works.

They have not looked at how to run it.

The Department has a number of Aboriginal people working for them around the state. What you are saying is that their policy and their approach has failed. Why do you think it has failed and why is it that the placement principle that they have implemented bail house and the juvenile justice approach they have and the staffing things - why are they still failing?

Because they don't consult with Aboriginal people. With regards to the child placement principle, we were fighting for something more than just the child placement principle but they have taken apart what we started with the extended family. We were the ones who started that and tried to do things in a culturally appropriate way. They have taken that and tried to put it into legislation without looking at everything that is involved in it. You can't do that in Aboriginal affairs and you can't do that with child care because you have to look at the whole thing. It is their attitude, where they make legislation for and on our behalf without the consulting processes.

What Aboriginal people are saying is that we want our own legislation. We are actually putting in claims for the whole of our tribal area. We have gone past that now. What we are saying to Australia is that you all have to talk on our terms. It is not just going to be Aboriginal people who benefit from this, it is going to be the whole of the country. The whole country has to go through the healing process.

What do you think needs to happen in the future? You have been talking about land rights principle and sovereignty and control.

We want control of our rights. We want control of our kids. We want to be able to go onto our sacred sites. We should have more rights in this country because this is our country. Our legends don't tell about us being here for 40,000 years - our legends tell about us being here since time memorial. We have our own gods and beliefs. They have been around a lot longer than white man's beliefs. We have our own child rearing practices. The more we get involved with white man's society, the more we are creating our own destruction. We have to seriously think about going back to the old ways. If we don't start doing something now and the people in government don't start doing things our way, Aboriginal people will say "I'm sick of this" and start using violence. We have nothing to lose. That is the frightening thing.

A lot of the violence has been inverted, hasn't it?

Yes. There are kids that we will not be able to control. They have grown up under a different system. Our kids are dealing with a much more violent society.

What are the things that could safeguard the position of Aboriginal children?

The things that we are trying to do at the moment - setting up national legislation, the question of sovereignty and trying to set up alternatives to institutions based on Aboriginal culture - things that are culturally relevant to us. It has already been proven that they do work. I have heard it said from kids in Sydney that it has worked. I have known kids that have been into heavy drugs. Some of them have got off them. I asked them how they did it and they said they got back into the culture. When they went back to Sydney they went through the whole process again. These kids are kids that have lived in the city all their lives. They would not know how to survive in a country situation.

Underlying the issue of control - is that a great assessment getting back that control for communities?

Yes, getting back that control for communities and tribes. It is also the question of sovereignty. We have to go back in order to go forward. We have to deal with all these problems - our sicknesses, our kids being forceably removed, our men and women being incarcerated. What we have to go through is 200 years of healing. How do you do that?

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Interview No. 2 - JENNY PRYOR

NORTH QUEENSLAND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CORPORATION FOR CHILD CARE

How many years have you been involved in the Aboriginal child and family welfare?

Since the Aboriginal Legal Service days - going back to 1976.

Then you were involved in setting up the Townsville AICCA.

Yes, in 1980.

At that time, why did you feel there was a need to set up an Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency?

I was working with the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs on Palm Island and was seeing the way that our people were still being kept oppressed. I was a paid clerk but then I got involved in the welfare area. People were still asking the Department to order their nappies - they couldn't do the basic things that we do on a day-to-day basis ourselves for even having the right of choice. It was all still done by the white man. We were still being kept welfare dependent and still keeping us oppressed. We talk about self determination and management but it is only in a gesture. If the white government really believed in self determination and management for our people then there would be no need for them. There would be a lot of unemployed people.

What were some of the other problems at that time?

It was also in relation to the care of their children - they never had full control. They were still going back to the old days of being under the Act. The Act is still present in Queensland. If the Queensland Government wanted to enforce that Act they could still do it because the Act has never been abolished. When you have councils that are set up to have bylaws to have their say it is like the old Aboriginal court system where, rather than going through the mainstream where you had a circuit magistrate coming over once a month, the Aboriginal Justice of the Peace would deal with issues.
The JP would walk around with a whip and hunt the kids to school. It is that mentality that has been passed on because of what he was used to being brought up under and it was still there in the 1980's and it was an accepted way of life.
The Department of Family Services, because of their own act but still not having any idea of mission life, the way they would see the community was that everyone was incompetent and neglected. Most of our kids were being taken away and put into institutions. Placing kids back into the community has more or less only been enforced in the last 5 years. Most were being sent over to the mainland. When you talk about policy changes, the Aboriginal child placement principle must be legislated.

What principles should that be based. You mentioned self determination but can you be a bit more specific. What does that involve? Why self determination?

For example, in disciplining our children a father well respected on Palm Island flogged his child because he was petrol sniffing. He got taken to court and was charged with grievous bodily harm. He went to district court and almost went to jail but was placed on a bond. It took away the rights of the parents to chastise their children. Meanwhile you have Department people saying that they don't know how to be parents, but the Department is more detrimental to the child rearing practices of Aboriginal people. From that you had kids who were deliberately commiting offences and wanting to go to Cleveland (institution) because they had their own beds and 3 meals a day. They saw it as a holiday rather than as a punishment. It was like a circus. Even when the Magistrate would come once a month to the community it was a circus day. Living in a remote community where the system comes in once a month is seen as a new event and is not seen as being frightened of being part of that system. It was a novelty. I spoke to the visiting Magistrate at the time and said we had to reverse the system in the sense that if you are in trouble you are not going to go to Cleveland, you are going to stop in this community.

When you talk about the Aboriginal child placement principle it needs to be statutory and needs to be given the recognition. The same as AICCA's need to be given statutory powers to empower the workers or Agency in the type of duties that they carry out. Where we are left open today is that our workers do not have the right to instigate a Care and Protection investigation. If one of our own people comes up and says a person is neglecting their child and we knows it is true then we have to either ring the police or Family Services because they are the two organisations with statutory powers to come with us. When the police or Family Services call we have to jump because it is one of our children. Are they competent enough to know that this is a real case. There is always that dilemna. There is the dilemna of continually educating Department workers on the cultural differences and on how to deal and approach Aboriginal clients.

There are two things here in some ways you are talking about - the kids that you are talking about that are in the system or have contact with the system and how the system deals with it and you are talking about having greater control of rights in that system. Are you talking about having control in that system? Do you want to change the system The other side of it is generally the rights of Aboriginal families in relation to their children and the rights of their children as well, which is related to that.

I would like to see us have our own system and we don't be part of the white system at all. Until you change the attitudes of the Australan Government in this land of separatism then we cannot just deliberately set up another law just for Aboriginals. To take into account of what's happened over the last 205 years they have to start thinking seriously because of the institutionalisation that has happened to our children from day one. When you talk about the parents of those children today that are still in the system you find that most of the parents are their parents who have been in dormitory days who don't know how to be parents and they are labelled. It is like the hereditary type behaviour. It is the same as growing up with alcoholism and violence. It is an accepted way of life. So then the kids carry it. If we cannot have full total autonomy on determining the rights of our children and what happens to our children, then the system needs to change to be more culturally appropriate to suit us, but we must have the overall say on what happens to them.

Why is the present system the Queensland Government is designing unsatisfactory. I assume by what you have said that it is unsatisfactory in spite of the fact that you have been involved (not just you individually, but other AICCA's). Is that going far enough - the child placement principle and the policy that you have got developed now. If that is implemented is that going to solve all the problems?

No. Because it is not legislation for a start. It is only a practicing policy and there you are only talking about the placement of children in the sense of what happens to them. There are still the dangers. Even with adoption in the Queensland law, if someone wants to adopt they do not have to notify us under their Secrecy Act. That is another child who is lost under the system. With the child placement principle, because it is not legislation Family Services still have the overriding power. They have the last say. Because AICCA's are under-funded and under-resourced we cannot keep the pace of keeping control of our children.

All handling of the cases that come through.

Yes. If the Department were sincere in helping out with the problem they should give the resources that come with the practising policies.

That is another issue too, related to the policy, what if you had state legislation. With the principles you have got with the Queensland Government been working on with you, you have got child welfare legislation. If the principle was put into that legislation would that be enough?

It would make it a lot easier because then we would have the right to choose who our care providers are. At the moment there is a special criteria, although they are changing it to be more culturally appropriate to Aboriginal and Islander people. However, at the same token, they can have the last say on approving foster parents. Althought the new Juvenile Justice Act is coming into line they have put the new Act in without consultation with Aboriginal and Islander people. They are saying how good the Act is and how it will be beneficial to us but there are no resources to go with it. It is always set up to fail. We need the funding that goes with the child placement principle in ensuring not just the placement of kids in short term, long term and emergency placements. You also have to look at kids that are coming through the juvenile justice system itself; what programs need to be implemented to suit that particular child and culturally appropriate to suit that child's background.

When you first set up the Agency, do you think your aims then were similar to what they are now and can you compare the way they were then with how they are now?

Our aims have always been the same, but now it has become greater in the sense that there is more that we can see because it is more or less trial and error and realising how much more we need to ensure it is successful that we are looking holistically at the best end result for our children.

AICCA in Townsville has been officially funded since 1984, although we have been operating voluntarily since 1980. Before we had no control we used to be fighting all the time about our kids being placed into white foster homes - even not having the right to know how many of our kids were lost in the system. But now because we are becoming more professional in our way of operations, the Depart-
ment are handing more over to us, but only because they can't handle it. It is not because of goodwill. They don't know what to do anymore. The last resort is they need us. So they need us as much as we need them, but we only need them because of their statutory powers and their resources - not because we don't know how to do things. In that sense, we have achieved more in that short period of time, however, there is still even more that they have to give.

Therefore you are saying that although the situation has changed, the aims are still the same. What are the aims you are referring to?

One aim is to promote and provide culturally appropriate services towards our Aboriginal children, promoting their own identity, implementing culturally relevant programs and maintaining family and extended family.

Why is identity important? This was one of the very strong things right at the start whent he AICCA's were being set up. Why is it so important?

If you don't know where you have come from, you are lost. It is the same argument I had with the Regional Chairman of ATSIC last week when only ten of our Aboriginal kids were included in a trip to go to the Indigenous Youth Conference. On the 45 seater bus everyone else was Torres Strait Islander. Our 10 Aboriginal kids were forced to wear the Islander T-shirt. The Chairman saw it that we were only arguing over colours. I said that what colours you wear is who you identify as. No-one should be forced to wear anyone's colours. She said, "But our kids wear your Aboriginal T-shirts". I said, "They are walking on our Aboriginal land and if they feel comfortable then there is no problem about it". She could not understand what I was saying. It is how you identify.

If you look at all our kids that have been institutionalised and removed, those kids have bad identity problems. They are the kids that have gone onto the big jails because they are so confused. They were brought up like white kids.

When 2 full blood Aboriginal kids from Palm Island were fostered into a middle class white family they learnt ballet and the piano and were terrified of their own black people. Now when those white people get sick of looking after them, when they decide they are not "good little black kids" anymore they throw them back into the system. They are so confused they don't know who they are.

Apart from the question of individual identity, why is identity important across the country to all Aboriginal people?

One people, one land. This is where we come from. It is our land, ownership, sovereignty, land rights.

That is the connection I am trying to explore - children, identity and land and sovereign and other indigenous rights. That theme has not been drawn out a lot.

To me, identity means who I am, who I identify as, where I come from and your ties with the land - your reason for being. That is the way I see it. When talking about being proud of your own identity it is not being ashamed of where you come from. Once you feel right within yourself and knowing who you are and where you come from and all the ties of your ancestors and the land and "this is our land so we should not feel infereior", then our children grow up with a clear mind and there is no confusion, no shame, no guilt of who we are because we are the rightful people of this country.

Our identity is our dreaming of where we come from and where we are today and where we are going to go in the future. We will always be here because of our dreaming and because of our ties with the land.

That is why it is important to re-establish those. That is what Barbara Cummings was talking about yesterday in relation to the Darwin kids who were in institutions.

Not being classified as quarter castes or half castes.

There is also the question of who identifies?

Who determines who is an Aboriginal? It is how you live. It is how you want to live and how you identify.

Are there still problems with authorities and officialdom and the way they conceive what Aboriginality is and how it relates to kids as well?

Yes, that is the policy. The same with the child placement principle. If you have a mixed relationship then there seems to be more consideration given to the non-Aboriginal side because they are half white. It doesn't matter what half you are, white people will never accept a half Aboriginal child fully because they have the "silly blood" in them. When doing a case plan the Department seem to have more flexibility with their decision making in dealing with a half Aboriginal child. Even when talking about changing policy within the Department the mentality of those people that white is white is still there. That is where the confusion of people's identity comes in because the system has made our people feel ashamed of our identity that our kids are confused.

You have identified some of the issues that need to be overcome, the system was one issue. I want to come back to that because you have talked about policy and legislation and have just talked about within the system a particular kind of mechanism like the case conference. Do you think the mechanisms within Departments and mechanisms that policy has set out, do those discriminate against Aboriginal people and how does that happen?

That is their practising policies that they go by when talking about the mechanisms within the Department. For instance, they have a case plan and then a case review. Then, depending on what's happened during that period to the review time, it could end up being under review time before they make a final decision of what happens to the child - does the child go back to the natural parents or does he stay with the extended family or foster family. Because their practising guidelines are not culturally appropriate for the best interests of an Aboriginal child, they are more detrimental. Like a kid thats been in a white foster home for fifteen years. Because that child is happy, they still don't see that that child has been deprived of their cultural identity, in the sense of associating with the black community, having their links back with the natural family. All those issues. The fact that they have not looked at the case conference procedure, the fact that their reviews are 3 months apart, the guidelines for those reviews - all of those things they have not even assessed how they could be culturally appropriate; they will therefore be discriminatory.

Only because you have AICCA, it is now that in case planning and case reviews AICCA must be involved. If AICCA is not involved in mandatory reporting and ensuring that the principles of Aboriginal child placement are upheld, the Department can go and do what they want. The materialistic values are still being put into place.

So a lot of Departmental practice issues include social work practice issues then assume to be appropriate for Aboriginal children and families. You are saying they are not.

No, because the only time when they are is when we have been involved from day one.

So how do you address that? What you are talking about is a while system.

There has to be more AICCA's established. You can't afford to have Aboriginal workers working in within the Department because they have to stick by the Department's policy. I feel sorry for Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales, who only have one AICCA and are covering the whole state. How are they expected to ensure that our children have not been lost somewhere in their country. White people see the setting up of separatism. The Government has separate programs for ethnics. Why can't they do it for the indigenous people of this country?

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Interview No. 3 - BARBARA CUMMINGS

KARU AICCA, DARWIN

What are your ideas about the present situation in relation to children and families?

Karu has failed dismally because there is no long-term vision. The big question is who are we really operating for. In all AICCA's you will have the Link Up component and the Substitute Care component. One is funded by the State, the child placement principle and the 1983 Welfare Act and the only reason why ATSIC pays for the Link Up position is because it is State Government. From the early days they were not responsible for past welfare government legislation. For my 5 years I feel the adoption register is going to have a limited life.

So you are saying the Northern Territory Government are not responsible for, say, prior to 1978.

They are saying that.

So everything else that happened was the Commonwealth Government's responsibility?

That is what they are saying. I disagree with that. I feel they should be part of that. With Karu you still have your sub care but it is set up to fail because you only have one person operating it. They see that person only to run out and grab some foster parents and have them available if a child comes into care and is at risk. There is no flow on or liaison afterwards, either when the child gets picked up there is no involvement from us when Case Plan Meetings are on. We have a juvenile justice area that doesn't have one black person. Sometimes it looks like Maori's are preferred. There has been no encouragement from the Department to recruit. My concern is that I don't believe in Public Servants because they don't work for the community. It is not the answer to recruit people to work within the Public Service.

Why is that?

The bottom line is that they have to push the Department's policy.

Even if the Department policy state the child placement principle it doesn't make a difference.

No

Do you think you can identify why that happens?

Because most of the Aboriginal Welfare Officers work mainstream. There is no such thing as an Aboriginal identified position within the welfare department. You work with everyone that comes through the door. To put Aboriginal people in there just for the Department doesn't serve any purpose to us. I have tried to encourage that those Aboriginal Welfare Officers become part of a committee structure to assist us to get established.

Right from day one Karu has been forgotten about. I have been very loyal to SNAICC and I feel they have failed me. There is such a discrepancy in the funding of AICCA's and we were incorporated in 1984. The first thoughts about setting up AICCA was when VACCA came in

1979, the International Year of the Child, and we had submissions into the Office of Child Care and they still refused and did not recognise us. I believe that what it was, there was an argument between the Commonwealth and the State about whose responsibility it was and that's when the Grimes and Holding agreement happened. We are still in the same situation. For my Link Up program for the 5 year plan, it is not just anybody who can be a part of that, apart from the adoption issue. There are 5 institutions in my town and the majority of people who came into the institutions came from all over the NT and particularly Central Australia. No-one has yet helped us to address our displacement.

These are the Aboriginal institutions, are they?

Yes. There was the Kahlin, which was the Government institution, and then that transferred to Bagot, Croker, Gardenpoint and Groote Island. Those core of the Darwin families all come from the 5 groups, which are separate to the Larrakia, who are owners of the country. When they said last year that they were going to open the adoption register, I had the biggest argument because we are still being ignored. We don't object to the adoption register being option - they must have their access to their information, but what about us. We have 3 objectives - land rights, which the Land Council has forgotten to include us.

You were talking about land rights in relation to the kids of the people who were in those institutions. What's the connection there?
The whole question about Aboriginal children's rights and land rights - can you explain that?

The thing is our Link Up is incomplete until we can return to country and we have a Land Rights Act in the NT. Yet the majority who come from the institutions who live in town still don't have homes. We are living on someone else's country. I am talking about second generation and third generation. No-one has been addressing that, to encourage Barbara to go back to her country and take her skills back there. That is how the Land Rights Act has been established, where it only recognises those of full descent. I think that is unfair in a sense because they consider people like Meaderby (?) yet anybody from Millingimbi can come in and live in Housing Commission houses in the mainstream but they still have country. This assumption of presumption I don't have any cultural business and that goes for all of us. It may not be the direct fault of the Land Council but it is the anthropology section that does up the genealogies and when they do the claims they all know there are 5 institutions out there. Their job is to ask people like Barbara for a list of all Retta Dixon people, go to Alice Springs group or Gardenpoint group and ask for a list of all the names of those children and try and fit them back onto country. My argument to the Land Council was that it's got nothing to do with any community council when talking about Barbara going back to country. It's a decision that should be made between me and my family because we get criticism from people in the remote areas that we are not Aboriginal. We are in the same situation as them. They live in a resident mission that has all the resources. As soon as they get some tin or iron they go back to their country and put it on their country. It is the same as us. We don't have the transport or the resources. When they pushed us out of the home we drifted into the town. There were no halfway houses or hostels. We lived in poverty from that time. They just transferred the poverty into empty Housing Commission houses. So nothing has really been addressed. That is my major concern - those 5 groups.

The land rights issue is mainly the identity thing.

Yes. There is a lot of us who are very afraid of rejection. Some of the Land Council people have expressed that the way to do it is for us to go back and ask people to go back on the

country. I said we shouldn't have to ask. That's my mother's country. She was stolen and it's not the people's fault. Regardless of whatever it is in the Land Rights Act charter or not there are lots of things they do and they are not supposed to do because of the charter. That is the prime thing they have to address.

You know where your country is?

I went there the first time last year and I am going back. I have to make a permanent place for my family. Out of 6 of us, there is only one person who is employed.

So all your family were put in the homes?

No. Only the 3 eldest who were born before 1953. The other 3 stayed with my mother. We are demanding land rights and access to land rights like every other Aboriginal because we are defined as Aboriginals we were born under the Act and we have to go back. The people have to address the fact that they have to accept us back. It is a very emotional and delicate matter because of the fear of rejection. The Land Council is listening to me and I said to them it is in your interests to come on board with us, not only for the land rights issue but also the access to information to help us with our Link Up - access to Commonwealth and State records.

I want to employ a researcher who can co-ordinate one person from each group who can work with the archives and the State Reference Library and the mission about how best to access the information and what should be accessible to the public. I am suggesting that there is one copy for the public, which deletes all the names and the other copy is tucked away, but no-one else has the access. They have someone responsible for that. That's why I try to put Croker, Gardenpoint and Retta Dixon on my committee - to localise the AICCA, and that's been a big problem with Karu for so long because we have had people from other states trying to establish something - they have no goals and don't know the history.

It sounds like you are reasserting some aims that you came up with many years ago. Could you summarise those? Are they different now or the same?

It is not enough to just introduce me to my mother and I wasn't adopted. That is not enough. I need to know all these other pieces of the jigsaw that helps me put the picture together. The only way I can find that out is by reading Government records and mission archives. In my Retta Dixon group there is one girl who has a collection of photos from the missionaries and for years it has been a very contentious issue that she has got it. We need to have a keeping place for those photos so they are more accessible to the community so there is information to the community so I can show my children where I came from.

We support the legal investigation into the displacement of Aboriginal children. I called a meeting last year of a number of people because of the mentality of still only recognising people of full descent and I think we have a case similar to the British children. I brought a Legal Aid lawyer to the meeting and the lawyer agreed to take evidence from certain ones - I have one that was sent away. Her father was a white man and he put her in a home. He died and she was left there. She was sent away to school and was sexually assaulted during those years. She has had great problems today as a result of that.

She has children herself?

Yes.

Of those adults and children who were removed, is partly what you are saying also addressed at what happens with those kids today?

Yes. Even with my children I have had problems with my kids because I had no parent link up. I feel angry about that. We cannot continue to carry on the way we are with Karu presuming that it's tokenism. My services are free and I am administrative director trainer, the lot.

We have never been involved in community organisations because we were still in the homes. We were forced from birth to go main-
stream so, consequently, it has been difficult to train people to think like me. I escaped and went to school in the 1970's and was able to pick up those skills, as well as go into welfare and work as a Social Worker. I know how the system operates but the Department has a very poor record of recruiting Aboriginal people as staff. When they do they are only mainstream - they don't work for the community.

When you say mainstream and the Department, are you saying you can't change the system to deal with those problems? Does it lead to what your plans for the future look like? What does it mean for your community in terms of services for your children in this area and families?

I can't see it going any other way - to community control. I know my limits in the judicial area. I know that I can't do certain things by law in the child protection area and that there is mandatory reporting. It's still like the Department takes no notice of me and they helped train me. There should be a system where the money should be for us but they spend a full-time training program for 12 months where people can learn what happens in the system. It is difficult to do that. With the juvenile justice system there is no Aboriginal Parole Officers.

You are talking about a slightly different approach to the old ideas about Aboriginalising departments.

No, I don't believe in that because they forget to come back. The public service always recruits interstate people - it's easier. It's time the interstate Aboriginals went back to their states instead of making decisions on us.

Karu has been set up to fail - there is no administration, there is no Bookkeeper, there is no Director. There are only 2 positions. It's time that SNAICC did something about it as well.

I would like a state conference on the 5 institutions and I want the 3 issues addressed. Not only the government has to address it but we ourselves as people have to address it because it is part of a grieving process. At a state conference Central Australia and us should be able to address those issues and come up with positive recommendations about what direction we are going. The conference is not for any people outside the state. I thought that maybe a consultation who can organise the state conference for me. I don't know what he appropriate person to do it would be. I need a consultant to go out and canvas certain groups about what they think about those 3 issues that affect all of us.

The Department and past community people have treated us all the same and we are not all the same. We are different. Because of the different country, the different states and different people. It's not my responsibility as a NT to accommodate other people's children because it's not my people. I have to look after those people from my state.

I presume that doesn't mean you don't care, but is it because it's a matter of the proper cultural upbringing of kids?

Yes. They are lost. It creates an identity and a belonging. If we had Indian children I would want to look for an Indian family to look after the children because he would be confused if he lived in the Aboriginal community and he would not learn about his culture.

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Interview No. 4 - RON JAMES

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

How long have you been involved in VACCA.

Roughly 15 years - 15 years with a break of 2 years when I went to Darwin.

Are you actually a founding member of VACCA?

No, I came in not long after it. I came in around 1978 or 1979, so it wouldn't be quite 15 years.

It was just operational then.

When I was there Graham Atkinson was the Social Worker and Mollie Dyer was the Program Director when I first become involved with VACCA. I was first of all co-opted on in Gary Murray's place. So, roughly, I have had 13 years experience with VACCA.

As a background about yourself, you have been involved in Aboriginal affairs or Aboriginal positions within the public service mainly.

For 15 years. Before that I was with the Aborigines Advancement League for 3 years. So, all up I would say you would be looking at 16-17 years working involvement. But on VACCA it's only been as a Director. Then I worked with the Office of Child Care, which was a funding agency of VACCA. At the same time I was on the Board of Directors. I was in the unique position of being a Director of VACCA and also responsible for the funding of VACCA. There were some concerns that there could be a conflict of interest in relation to the 2 roles I had to play.

In the early days do you recall what the ideas were of people like yourself - what ideas did the community hold about child welfare. Why was it an important area for you to get involved in.

It was an area that had already interested me. In particular, working with the Office of Child Care at the time I looked at a number of issues, but Aboriginal affairs in general is of interest to me. I was on MAYSS (Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Support Scheme), which was one of the old CYSS programs. That was before I became involved with VACCA, but that looked at youth programs. I was also involved as a AAL rep on Bert Williams Hostel in the early days when the Hostel had committees from organisations, with Adriana Palamara, who is from the State. There was also a guy working there called Bill Jackson, who eventually did some work with VACCA. So those connections made me link to VACCA. But other issues that I was involved with - I was the VACCA rep and the Departmental rep with the establishment of VACSAI. I was the Steering Committee Chair initially and then the Deputy Chair of VACSAI. That's taking the child care position or welfare of Aborigial kids one step further.

What were the ideas at that time when the Agency was in its infancy?
What was the view about getting involved in this area. What were the motivational ideas?

The philosophy and motivational ideas were the removal of Koori kids in the earlier stages. Although Victoria wasn't affected with the removal of kids to the extent of other states like Queensland and Western Australia, the end result was that the kids were ending up in Victoria. I think that was fairly significant. We had a lot of removal here with our kids and that's going back to the days of Aunty Marg Tucker but the kids under the Harold Blair scheme that were removed, that was a lot of VACCA's work in the early days. Over the years since the regional concept of ACCA's and the funding of ACCA's, people lost sight of what ACCA was really about and that was prevention. Now it is just a bandaid type treatment.

With the composition of the Committee, I don't think you have the commitment now on the Committees that you had in the earlier days. I think the standard of VACCA services has dropped. You only have to look at the professionals we had in the earlier days - we had 2 or 3 Social Workers. You actually had an Aboriginal Social Worker, which was Graham Atkinson and you had some fairly skilled Aboriginal workers - Esmai Walker had a welfare certificate. You had people who were more qualified at the work level.

Why was there a need to have your own agency? Why couldn't those people, with their skills, go into the Department and work there, for instance.

I think there was a real fear and that was something through the 60's and 70's and there still is a real suspicion of wellfare workers, especially non-Aboriginal, because a lot of Koories view them as the perpetrators of the people who actually removed the kids. There is a real threat. That's still coming through with the lack of people working in the child care area and Community Services now. They tried various positions. Fay Carter, who was our Chairperson, worked there with very little success.

In those early days the establishment of organisations like VACCA fitted into the concept of self determination and self management. So when you had more people coming in - your Mollie Dyers - it was a passion of hers. It was something that she played a big part in establishing ACCA's and that probably goes back through the removal of her mother from her mother in those earlier days, and although Mollie didn't experience the break between her families it led to that. I think people felt there was a need to take control - the system wasn't working for Aboriginal people. A lot of their philosophies and views were in conflict with the Koori views - with the opposition of adoption and the need to have a Koori perspective or a Koori voice. It's the same as the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service or Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service - there is a need to have a service targetted specifically for Koori people. You could argue that there is a form of apartheid in having separate services, but I would not see it that way because there are so many social inequalities in this society. When you have a group within a community that are being particularly disadvantaged in various areas, health is one area where you still have real health problems, then you look at VACCA where there's still no resolution to the removal of kids from homes and the values - if a child had a dirty nose they would say they were in moral danger. It might be a non-Aboriginal viewpoint but it wasn't for the Koori community. So there was that need to have a separate service.

At that time did you feel that a service like this could overcome those problems? If a small agency tackling what were, after all, historical and system problems, a system by the sounds of which had value judgements about how it intervened in families, how it took away what they saw as neglected kids. On the other hand you had one agency which was quite small. Did you see it as being able to tackle all those problems or was your view a bit more limited than that in the sense that it wasn't meant to take on the whole thing?

As I said previously, the original concept of VACCA was prevention.
But all the other stuff overtook it. When you have an agency like VACCA that started with the philosophy of prevention but then when you had all these other needs coming up like link-up, this is another step on the ladder. We talked the other day about the establishment of a health service, and I can

use this to compare to the way VACCA has developed, is when you look at the health services today the first thing they want to do is get a doctor to help. When you have a doctor all these other issues become apparent - the health of kids, you need pediatricians, the service just grows and grows.

In the initial stages there was the recognition from people that the Aboriginal community wasn't being serviced by the non-Aboriginal agencies and there was need to look at that. The way that VACCA and the outspoken nature of the VACCA staff in the early days has pushed the service up front to the extent where the mainstream agencies see VACCA as the peak body, is rightly so. I think the original intention was to have control over the decisions affecting our kids, so really you had a preventative program and you had input into policy. That was the original intention, but then everything started coming on top of that. This was clearly identified in the review that was carried out by Social Security at the time - the Poulter review - and that identified a whole range of issues and identified that VACCA was providing a bandaid service to the community. I don't think the intention was to go into it as heavy as it did, as far as the hands on type of work. You are looking at it running on a similar line to all other services. You now have family group homes. You have services that are similar to mainstream but with an Aboriginal perspective. The earlier concepts of self determination have driven VACCA to go in that direction. When the report was done, Reg Blow was the Chairperson of VACCA and Graham Atkinson was working as the Program Director of VACCA. The two Departmental reps on that were Jim Poulter and Flora Butler.

Was it called the Poulter Review?

I'm not sure of the name of it. I think the prevention stuff was highlighted strongly in it. There were some concerns about the review because it brings back the concern that's going on now about who funds ACCA's. Some of the people on the VACCA Committee at the time had real concerns that this was a review to look at moving the whole of the funding of ACCA's across to the States because the review was carried out by a Commonwealth Department - there was no State involvement on the review, only on an advisory capacity. I don't think there was any State representation on the review.

The Victorian review?

It was Commonwealth. It was a review of ACCA in Victoria, but there was no State rep on the review team.

In 1979 VACCA was involved in organising the first Child Survival Seminar. Did you attend it?

Yes I did.

They had international guests there.

Yes, Indians.

What was the purpose of that?

It was so long ago I can't remember, but there was a lot of work. I was involved with VACCA in those days.

Were there any other things that you can think of at that time that were philosophical, underpinnings or motivations. It was interesting that you have said that VACCA was part of the (?) movement of self determination in the Aboriginal community.

Initially, the issue of child neglect and welfare was recognised by Mollie Dyer and she was the one who really started to kick it off. Even when I first had contact with Mollie they had one little room at the back of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. That's where she was first located. In the same building you had 2 workers and they looked at the yough issues and the 2 earlier workers were Phil Cooper and Esmai Walker, so they actually worked in the same building. They were funded government positions when Mollie was playing the lone hand, with Graham Atkinson playing a part at a later stage.

I think the philosophy was to prevent the removal of kids. It wasn't actually looking at the other strands of child welfare. It wasn't looking at fostering and adoption - it was looking at preventing the removal of kids. That was the original intention, but all these other things kept coming up, to the extent where the State started funding them. Initially the State wasn't funding the program, it was funded by the Commonwealth. Because of all the other concerns that were being identified, the State started putting in little bits and pieces and from there it grew. They looked at Foster Care Workers and Adoption Workers and the family group homes came into existence.

Was that just a natural progression or do you think there was something significant in that, the fact that they had to take on so much to without a conscience effort to do so they absorbed the different kinds of services you pointed out before that are available in the mainstream but just with a Koori perspective.

We were identifing gaps in the system that weren't culturally relevant and were in conflict with Aboriginal self determination and self management. Even the removal of kids and the manner in which they were removed and the guidelines for which they were removed were coming from a totally middle-class perspective. There was no Aboriginal perspective in legislation or policies that affected Aboriginal kids. It was from a middle-class white perspective and we recognise that at VACCA.

That was what led us to start looking at these things. It comes back to the original removal philosophy. When you say kids are being removed, but are they at risk. They may be at risk from a non-Aboriginal perspective, but they aren't from our perspective.
There may be 7 or 8 kids in one room - they could be looked at in mainstream as morally wrong, whereas in our community it's not, because of the shortage of housing or, traditionally, Aboriginal people congregate in one area for sleeping purposes. So the needs of our kids weren't being addressed in a culturally relevant way.

I think the review of Poulter and Butler identified that clearly - the lack of culturally relevance in terms of the programs being provided. I think VACCA is going along that track. They are now saying if we have kids placed at the family group homes - if they are in a white family group home they are learning white values, they are not learning Koori cultural values. You can see that with a lot of the kids who have returned to communities or who have been fostered out that have not been allowed access to the Aboriginal community.

Another thing they looked at was the Gubbariginal movement where the non-Aboriginal people who were adopting kids in those days were bringing them back at special days to keep those links with the community. The number of our kids who were going into care were still occurring, therefore the system wasn't working. There was that need to have the services targetted specifically at Aboriginal kids.

What's your assessment about what happens these days. Have things changed?

There is more of an understanding. I think the governments of the day are listening more to what they did years ago. What's happened there is that it has kick started the bureaucrats to start thinking as well as knowing that the Koori community is not going to sit up and take it. I think there seems to be more of an understanding and more of an empathy with the problems we have today and that's coming through cultural awareness and other things, for instance, Murray Bull getting that claim. That would not have happened 15 years ago. People are becoming more socially aware. We need to revisit where we are going as an agency (VACCA). The time is right and people are aware to start making changes. I'm not talking about at the SNAICC level, but at a state level in Victoria. We have to re-establish ourselves as an agency. That is a big problem.

Are you saying there are still problems? Can you identify what the problems may be?

First of all there are problems with the number of caseloads our staff are working with. There are problems with the lack of training of our staff. There is a lack of direction within our agency - that's just from the agency's point of view. If you are dealing with professionals and if you can't sell the program to them then you will struggle. From what I'm hearing, there's a lot of negative vibes coming out because of VACCA, but then it comes back to the staff. You have staff who are supposed to provide a statewide function. That is one of the big problems as well. We are seen as a statewide organisation without the resources to provide a service.

Is that a big part of the problem - the resources?

It's a big problem - I recognise that. But then we still have to get the resources we have in place working properly. That's my concern. We all recognise we are under-resourced but how are we going to improve that. If we can't prove that we can efficiently run our organisation with what we have got, we are not going to have a strong argument to attract additional positions. That's my view.

What about the problems of children and families. Do you think they have changed or are they the same?

Communities are more mobile now than they were before. I think if anything, the family networks have broken down because you no longer have the extended families where you can drop the kids off with mum. A lot of it comes back to Social Security payments. People won't release their kids now because that's in their pockets. It's a big problem. It's the same with the aged. People are reluctant to let the parents go in an aged care centre because they rely on the cheque to survive. It comes back to resources and money. I believe greatly in the concept of self determination but I also believe now that we have to start performing. We just seem to lack direction.

Talking about the way the Agency functions itself, what about the context that the Agency operates in. Do you think that has changed enough to stem the causes of some of the problems that VACCA is still dealing with?

No, because what's happening to VACCA is we have been been driven still by non-Aboriginal values and philosophies and views. Even to the extent of disciplining kids or if a family is not handling the situation very well. This gently approach and 'they are a victim' approach. I believe in it to a certain extent but not to the extent it's promoted where you can't say to a person, for instance, one case where the child was sexually abused. When you have the perpe-
trator sitting down making decisions on where the child goes and what happens, because that's the way it happens now, we have to get back to our own values and stop spoon feeding people. In the older days there was discipline. There were family links. Nowadays people have kids but there are no kinship networks to back them up anymore. Those kids are placed in care. The evidence to support what I am

saying is the kids that we have going through VACCA now, their parents were clients of VACCA or victims. Therefore, we have done something wrong if we still have this cycle. In some instances there are even third generations coming through as VACCA clients. What are we doing wrong?

It sounds to me that you are also saying that the nature of the problem is changing in comparison to the way it was.

The nature of the problem is changing because it's a different problem now. In the earlier days of VACCA a lot of the kids were removed illegally, with the Harold Blair schemes and because of past practices of CSV where kids were removed without any knowledge of cultural differences. Now we have a different lot of kids coming through. We have kids coming through whose parents have never worked - they are victims of high unemployment; they are victims of the welfare system. You have a group of kids coming through now that don't have traditional Aboriginal families or links. Have a look at the people on the VACCA Committee and still are. Their parents have been born on missions and lived on missions and their views are quite different. There is a fairly heavy Christianity influence on people - their parents have strong moral values. I have found on the Committee that some of our Committee people have difficulty accepting some of the clients of VACCA. When someone comes in and we are saying that child should be placed back with their mother, when that child comes in a week before neglected. The strong moral values that the Committee people hold might be quite different to the worker, but where do you sit from when the child has been sexually abused because of the promiscuity that's going on in the community. The moral values of the Board seems to come out heavy on that but the system says, and this has been driven by the bureaucrats, that the main emphasis is to bring families together and maintain and strengthen the families (that's still VACCA's philosophy), but under current circumstances that's quite difficult to do.

So where do you think this is leading to? What do you think needs to happen from now on to the future?

I think the key Koori players have to become fair dinkum about what they are doing. They have to become serious. The days of using and abusing the system are gone. We have to survive and adapt to this society. I'm not saying to give up your Aboriginality but you have to get the skills. Who do we have in VACCA with the formal skills. Look at the things VACCA produced under Marj Thorpe. We are not generating anything. Ours now is a reactionary thing. We are reacting to everything. Originally we were a bit more pro-active. You had qualified white Social Workers coming in - you could control them and watch over them. The VAHS have white doctors and the VALS have white solicitors, but you have Koori people at the helm. Why are other states moving ahead of us in some areas when we were always the key agency. We have to get back and be able to produce to get the material out.

So you are talking about power of control and setting the agenda.

Taking control of our own lives and agencies like we were supposed to.

That would be a first step?

To strengthen the infrastructure.

When you have the springboard, what sort of things would you see the Agency looking to change or setting about trying to achieve?

I would go down two tracks. Firstly, there is still a need to address the current issues - the emergency issues and the issues we are dealing with, but we still have to place more emphasis on preventative stuff. We have to look at strengthening the families. I don't think it's VACCA's responsibility alone to do this. We have to link in other agencies to do this - VALS, VALS, AAL and the Aboriginal Housing Board. There has to be a greater co-ordination of these sorts of things. VACCA is only one problem. It's a cycle. The child is taken away because the parent doesn't have a house - they go to the Ministry of Housing and they say if you don't have a child then you don't get the house. They come back to VACCA and there's that cycle alone. Then for those people who are not coping, there is financial counselling needed.

I think now Koori people have a lot of opportunities as far as employment. My kids have found it easier to get jobs than non-Aboriginal kids. I think we have an opportunity because of the sensitivity and the high unemployment rate to start linking into getting jobs. We have to look at supporting the families.

The other thing we need to look at closely and it is going to be a big problem is drugs. In 10 years time our problem will be bigger than what it is now.

In the early days you talked about a more cultural way to deal with things. What scope is there for that for the future?

I don't think there is any. We used to have my nan come over. Dad wouldn't work for 3-4 months a year because he was working on the logs and during the winter. My grandmother would come over from Shepparton on the bus once a month with shopping and food and that was a strengthening. Then when we were flooded in Wangaratta we would stay at other people's places and we didn't feel uncomfortable and you didn't have the substance abuse that we have now. There was always something to eat. Now I find it's quite difficult to return to that because the welfare system has changed so much. We were forced to live that way. We didn't have any choice. There was no other income and how you lived with other families gave you your strength because you didn't have unemployment benefits. The only payment was the family endowment.

This was before Social Security was available?

Yes. Now people are setting up their houses and living independently. Where are their kids going to go. There is no role model.

Are you saying we have got to the stage where you have services that can formally stay to the mainstream model of services but with a Koori perspective and Koori direction and that's as far as they are going to get in the area of Aboriginal child and family welfare?

I think until such time as we can strengthen the family and the family networks then we are going to struggle. Have a look at the pockets of the people we are dealing with. The kids are taken off them and we try and sort it out but those kids return to the same environment. No-one has done work with the family. I could name the ones I have dealt with when I worked at the AAL 15 or 18 years ago. You would go there and nothing has changed.

So what you are saying is there is a lot more work of a preventative nature.

Yes and it needs to be done with families.

So prevention is an important principle that you mention.

Very important.

What about a principle like self determination. Do you think that with the child and family welfare system you have enough control to deal with these problems

No.

What additional things would you like to do?

We don't have access to senior bureaucracts. We don't have access to policy making processes. We don't have a Member of Parliament. We don't have a senior bureaucract who can represent our community.

Where the important decisions are being made there is no-one there who can influence those decisions. We have to rely on the generosity of a sensitive minister. We don't have control of the decision making process. That would be the first thing that I would see as being important. The second thing is to look at all the other organisations that are being set up and strengthening them to start addressing these problems.

Community organisations or departments?

Community organisations and government. There are two lots. There doesn't seem to be any co-ordination. There is no co-ordination of services. Families are just surviving. They are going from the same things year in year out. Why I can't say we have progressed is the health problems of 20 years are getting worse. The number of clients on VACCA's books are not diminishing. There are more violent crimes being commited by Koori kids.

Do you have any figures of the number of kids in care?

That comment is from the top of my head. Years ago I never knew of people who were up for armed robbery or for murdering people. There was a lot of petty crimes but not the serious crimes we are seeing now from our young people. Som eof these kids we are talking about are 14 or 15 years old. Even clients of VACCA are doing it. It would be interesting to look at the clients who were there 10 years ago and now many we have today - how it has expanded. Therefore, what does that say about VACCA, VACSAI and other agencies.

My observation is that in Victoria you have a government child welfare system which deals with mainly non-Aboriginal children and then you have a non-government Aboriginal section which deals with mainly Aboriginal children. The Aboriginal one is under-resourced and is flat out dealing with a bandaid approach and doesn't have time to deal with the preventative cases.

Prevention is my bag right across the board. If we can start preventing the removal of kids and start strengthening families and doing the things that we should be doing, I'm not blaming staff for what's happening, but I think we, as a Board of Directors, have to stand back and look at ourselves. We have to say we are not doing something right - we recognise there is a lack of skills with our staff and things are not being achieved and their are criticisms out there but, as a Board of Directors, what have we done? We went and workshopped and half the Directors didn't turn up and the other half turned up late. Staff themselves clearly identified gaps in the service. But what did we do - nothing. What are we doing - nothing. We are not supporting our staff. Staff reports come in and it's pushed under the rug. I know

what their frustrations are. Until we accept that we are going to struggle. Strengthening the Agency is the go and then look at prevention. Why staff get burn out is there are too many cases and staff are inexperienced. We have people who are clients of our Agency working as workers.

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Interview No. 5 - BRIAN BUTLER

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

How long have you been involved in the field of Aboriginal children's services?

Really about 30 years. Prior to launching the SA program just over 15 years ago, following in the footsteps of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, who had been in operation for some 18 months to us in SA. They were in business from 1975 I think it was and we launched the SA program in July 1978. Before that time in Port Augusta for about 14 or 15 years we have been running a similar type program under the auspice of the community centre in Port Augusta, but it wasn't recognised as a formal children's centre or Aboriginal child care centre as such. But we were still doing search and link up stuff and family support activities and in an informal way a substitute care program was being operated at Port Augusta at that time. So, it goes back to about 30 years now.

You were a founding member of the Aboriginal Child Care Agency in South Australia.

Yes. I was the founding Director of the Agency in SA. The patron for SA ACCA was Gladys Elphick, who has since passed on. She was the Chairperson of the Aboriginal Community Centre in Wakefield Street in Adelaide and it was she who organised to have 3 people draft up a submission for funding for such an agency. I was engaged to launch the program in 1970 and 1978.

What were some of the things that you had in mind when you set up the Agency. You referred to some of them briefly, but what were the basic things you were after at the time and what prompted you to want those things?

I guess it was common knowledge throughout the Aboriginal community that the mainstream welfare services were further destroying the fabric of Aboriginal families in SA rather than improving the quality of life for Aboriginal families, particularly the children in the state. That was the basic reason for wanting to wrest away from the State (in those days it was called the Department of Community Welfare) - wrest away from them the responsibility for our kids and therefore our families. In those days we were in conflict with the Department of Community Welfare and all of their practices and procedures in regards to Aboriginal families and Aboriginal children.

So you are saying that you felt they could no longer do the right thing by your kids and therefore you demanded the right to do it yourself. Is that right?

That's exactly right. We were trying to convince not only the State Government agencies, but we were trying to convince our own Aboriginal community that there was another way of doing things. It was really a big hurdle that we had to jump to gain the trust of the Aboriginal community. We had the ability as a non-government organisation to be able to produce the goods that the State agencies weren't producing. It was a difficult time. I don't think it was any more difficult than what it was then. There are more sophisticated people around who want to resist our controlling our own affairs, as opposed to the mainstream.

At the present time you mean or at that time?

That was actually evident at that time, but it was on the increase year by year to this present day that we know that we are lucky we were able to identify more readily some of the more complex and sophisticated means of resistance.

What arguments did you use and who were you arguing and talking with about these issues? What arguments did you use to justify wanting control of those services?

We initially took the argument straight to the government. I think we confronted the government head on in those days than we do today. We were all becoming desperate to see that there was no change and we could almost predict what was going to happen to some of our kids. I suppose it was a triple attack because we saw the urgency for changing attitudes on the service level. We saw the need to change attitudes within the bureaucracy. We had to change the attitudes of all levels of government really. That was made easier for us in the early stage by the efforts of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the manner in which they were able to get support within Federal Minister, Senator Gilfoyle.

I have been asking you about the kind of things you were demanding, but why was it important to get involved in this area in the way you did?

It was important to us because we knew that there needed to be a shift in practice and procedure. We knew there had to be a shift in the area of policy and legislation and we knew the present band of people working in their area were still working with an attitude back in the past. We knew that we couldn't do it ourselves. We knew there were too many people - there was an army of welfare people and people working in health and education who didn't subscribe to our view.

What was its State care? How big an issue was this? What was its state that prompted you?

The rights of our children were at stake. The future for our children were at stake. The fact that there was no real legislation to hang any argument on - no sound policy within government departments for us to hang our argument on. That's why I was saying it was urgent and necessary for us to put as much energy as we could into all those areas. It was urgent because we were able to identify so many kids who were in substitute care or adoption setting that we could see there was no future for those kids because they weren't getting the appropriate supports. The systems weren't in place to ensure that they were going to be guaranteed maximum support to overcome the traumas they experienced in their forced removal, for whatever reason.

Were there many Aboriginal kids removed from their families and communities in SA?

We will never know the number. In the early stages in SA we tried to put pressure on State Governments to allow us access to records and because they were so protective of those records and some cases we are sure that a lot of records were destroyed within district offices, particularly down in the Riverland and the southern part of the State, whereby some real atrocities were committed. We know that we are not going to have access to all of the documents that would give us any indication as to the number of kids who were removed. I would say that back in those days we were not going to get a true figure and even to this day we will never know the true number of kids who were taken away.

There were some towns in the mid north of SA where there are at least 50 or 60 % of people of Aboriginal descent who don't identify as Aboriginal people. They live in fear that somebody in the community will identify them as Aboriginal people because they don't identify themselves. It's very hard. We will never know the number. I can back that up by saying there is no one Aboriginal family in SA, that I know of, that hasn't been affected by the removal of a child from their family or extended family.

When you set up the ACCA were you using in the same way, for instance, because I know the first Australian Conference on Adoption - I don't know if you attended that.

In Sydney?

Yes. Were you there?

Yes I was.

I noticed that there was a very strong statement about self determination which was the outcome of a workshop over there. Were you all in accordance with those kinds of principles when you set up your ACCA?

The short answer to that is yes.

Can you elaborate on that? Why was there the importance of self -determination?

It was important to us. Back in 1976 we had made so much importance on the need for self management of our own programs. The State Government offered in their policy statement that Aboriginal organisations would be encouraged and supported to become self sufficient and self governing. When that statement was put out we latched all our arguments onto that statement and we have been fighting that from that day to this and still non-government Aboriginal organisations are finding it very difficult to be exclusively autonomous because there is so much pressure applied from other Aboriginal people who work within the mainstream system who still have a great desire to have a hand in controlling the affairs of the organisations, including this one.

I know that you were also involved in setting up the national organisation. Why was it important for there to be a national organisation in this area?

It was important in my view and certainly it was important in the engineers of the first submission for the development of the Agency in SA that we gain as much support from other Aboriginal agencies throughout Australia and gain the support of other national bodies (eg NAILS, NAIHO) that were attempting to bring to the fore Aboriginal issues. It was important for us to be a part of that system.

The national network?

Yes.

So you saw yourselves as part of that national movement?

Of course, because we then, at that early stage, knew the enormous task that we had before us on a state level that we were going to need to get that outside support. We were also then able to recognise that Australia was being reviewed by the international countries, mainly because Australia was being very critical towards other countries. It was useful to then use that as a lever for us getting on the international agenda issues that concerned us and it was important for us to show how the Australian Government was being very hypocritical in their treatment of our people and our kids in this country.

Can you state what problems were facing families and children at that time when you were looking to set the ACCA up?

The families were lacking support. The kids were lacking support. I think there were welfare programs, although welfare, health and education were running programs of a general nature they were running those programs without considering that there needed to be special education given to children who were removed - particularly children who were forcibly removed from their families because they weren't able to achieve in the existing programs. They were just regarded as problem kids - kids with learning disabilities. There were a lot range of excuses that people made for not wanting to spend more time and money on special programs and the kids weren't regarded as special kids. They were expected, even though they experienced separation trauma, to be able to settle down the same way as a child who was in a reasonably happy family environment.

What about the socio-economic conditions of families and children in SA at that time?

Certainly in the 1970's it was becoming more evident that Aboriginals - particularly the families who came into contact with welfare prior to that - a lot of the people who were employed, although they weren't highly paid, didn't regard themselves as being in poverty back on the farms and the stations until such time as they were forced away from that situation and brought into an urban situation. Because of their lack of skills and education they were unable to get the jobs and that was when things started getting bad for the families. That has not improved to this day.

How are things today for Aboriginal children and families in SA?

Although there are lots of people from communities around the state attempting to address the needs of Aboriginal children, the willingness is there. There are enough people who want to do things but unfortunately the funding, both at a Commonwealth and State level, doesn't get down to the ground. We have had to reduce the level of programs in this Agency alone to almost a half simply because we cannot get the funding to run those programs. The programs that we regarded as being the most effective and beneficial to our kids were programs that would enable kids who experienced separation trauma and who had been deprived of Aboriginal culture and contact. One of our major programs was to get those kids back in contact with Aboriginal communities from around the State. That program has been cut because of lack of funding. It's very hard because of the lack of support that we need to get from the funding authorities. The problem, which exists not only in this state but in every other state, is that we are competing against the state programs for the same money. They have more lobbying power and more people than what we have got in the places that matter. They seem to get funding for their programs on the basis that they have got Aboriginal people working in an Aboriginal unit within their Agency.

Do you think you are dealing with as many kids and families as you were before?

It's on the increase. We are dealing with more children today than what we were in 1978, at a younger age and with younger parents with less parenting skills and less survival skills than parents did in 1978.

Do you think the problems are different these days, as well as being an increase in the problems?

There are more problems. The problems that exist today is that there is no guarantee or less guarantee now of any future for our kids than what there was in 1978 because they can see that the life expectancy of Aboriginal people is falling below what it was in 1978. You have more young people attending funerals today then what was the case in 1978.

These are funerals for young kids?

Yes. There are young kids staying away from schools to attend funerals like people are losing time off from work to attend funerals. It is becoming a way of life for our kids to be seeing so much death in the Aboriginal community. The younger generation are noticing it more than what the younger generation noticed it before and they know the reasons why now. That's the difference I think today. They can see and understand that if they are lucky to have parents - and most of the kids that come before our notice or that are on our files today - don't even know what it's like to have a mother and father. Most of our kids now come from single mothers. In some cases the children may be from the same mother but they have different fathers. They are some added problems that kids can understand and live with today.

A lot of the problems that we have been talking about are common to the non-Aboriginal community or families and children, but what is it that makes the issue of the problems of Aboriginal children and families different? I noticed that you talked about cultural programs. There is something obviously different about the situation of Aboriginal kids in this country. What makes the difference?

Certainly the need to identify - the identity is paramount. If an Aboriginal child is brought up knowing that he or she is of Aboriginal descent, there is a great need for that child to identify, a great need for that child to gain as much knowledge about his or her identity for that person to become confident in living in this particular culture that exists today.

Often when the problems of Aboriginal children and families get spoken to everyone refers to their material problems, like they are living in poverty or they are unemployed or they have bad housing these are bad problems as well, but nobody speaks of the non-material things. Is there something in this whole syndrome with kids being dispossessed of their identity and their links with the land and the culture?

I know that generations back there seemed to be a stronger link with the land and the true Aboriginal culture. There is a problem today with our kids because of the competitiveness that exists today in education and the workforce. It makes it twice as hard for an Aboriginal child. It doesn't just apply to an Aboriginal child, it makes it twice as hard with ethnic groups as well. They have to be twice as alert and twice as good at things to be able to compete against the general non-Aboriginal, Anglo-Saxon community.

You've talked about the past and the reasons why you set up the Agency. Are you happy with the way things have developed since the time you set up the ACCA? Have things realised the way that you expected them to? Are they okay now?

I'm not satisfied that things are okay, with all of the effort that has been put into influencing the community at all levels, including the majority of Aboriginal communities. I'm not satisfied that enough has been done for our kids. I'm not satisfied that we are still having to argue the toss with Aboriginal people within Government Departments that they shouldn't support the mainstream principles. I'm not satisfied that they oppose the existence of non-government Aboriginal organisations as readily as they do. Therefore, they number quite a significant number of people in the community - Aboriginal people working in government agencies. The trend seems to be that they are teaching the young ones that to make it you need to be a government worker. There is not enough emphasis and support given even to those kids that they can tell at this early stage who are not going to be aiming their sights in becoming an academic within the public service sector.

So the non-government sector is still deprived of resources. Is that what you're saying?

Yes. Through all of the learning institutions, including the Aboriginal Task Force, it still seems to me that the trend is that you prepare academics or people to gain as much academic qualifications as possible, but it still seems to me that the majority of the academics or people who gain those qualifications end up working and supporting the principles of mainstream.

About the bureaucracy, for instance, and the Aboriginal people working in there, in the 70's there were a lot of subjective and value based decisions being made about Aboriginal children and families and the attitudes and assumptions within the Department, which you talked about earlier, has it changed because you have a lot of Aboriginal people in there. Is there still a problem of institutional racism within the laws, the departments and procedures and policies?

I don't believe that it has changed the attitudes or reduced the degree of institutional racism. I don't think it has reduced it to such a degree where one would say that it's significant. I still believe that although there has been an attempt to have Aboriginal people working within the government system, one would have thought that with the number that were there, there would have been greater change to practice and procedures and policies, and more significant changes and Aboriginal flavour reflected in legislation. It has not happened. The education area, although you would hear people say that in the curriculum and the history books there has been a significant Aboriginal influence. That may be so but it doesn't come through when you look at the schools right across the board. There is no outward change or positive change towards Aboriginal people in this country.

That's reflected in the bureaucracy too, you think?

Yes.

With things like the Aboriginal child placement principle and with other protocols that exist within the Department between the bureaucracy and the non-government sectors and ACCA, for instance, are you satisfied that you are able to handle the problems that families and children have presently in comparison to before because you obviously do have more control now than you did have in the 70's. Can you comment on that?

I think we are at a stage now where Government Departments, particularly Family and Community Services, the Health Commission and Education Department, recognition towards ACCA is that they pile us up with all sorts of work. They are making referrals to this Agency and say we recognise you and will make all these referrals. What they are doing is loading us up with all of the work but not giving us any of the resources to do the work. They will pressure us to such a degree whereby they would know that their department would stand behind them. Anything that we couldn't do they would be forced to pick up or nothing would get done about the particular issues and problems for our families and children.

What about specifically on practice issues like the principles that the mainstream child welfare system uses in terms of mandatory reporting, permanency planning and other social work practices. How do you view those these days because past Social Workers, and I go back to the first Australian Conference on Adoption, the blame was levelled squarely at the Social Work profession. How do you see that profession performing these days?

We still have to watch, particularly Family and Community Services, very closely because they are still, to this day, making inappropriate placements. Even right now we are in the process of tackling Family and Community Services to get a child away from a non-Aboriginal foster parent. The people that we have running the offices throughout the state are still in the old guard.

What can you conclude from the fact that if you've got so many Aboriginal people working in the bureaucracy and the inappropriate decisions are still being made, what is it that's going wrong?

I suppose you referred to it before, that they are still sticking to the mainstream principles.

There are many reasons for that. It's a well known fact that, looking at the existing group of Aboriginal children in this state, the Aboriginal children of the people who work in government right now in those mainstream jobs are going to be far more likely to get a job or to get ahead than those on the lower socio-economic band. Even throughout the Aboriginal community there seems to be a separation. The traditional Aboriginal people are in one basket; the rural Aboriginal people are in another basket; the metropolitan Aboriginal people regard themselves as being better and knowing more than those other people. This is what's happening here. The behaviour in the Aboriginal community is becoming more competitive, especially in the metropolitan area. The reasons for supporting mainstream principles is driven by their own personal needs. So they are comfortable in supporting mainstream because they know that the mainstream is going to look after them. They hide behind that and a lot of these people have a lot of influence. They control what happens with the people in the lower socio-economic level and these organisations, such as ours, start to look after the interests of the 'little people'.

The ones who are still in a poor socio-economic level?

Yes. A classic example of this is that you have people who work in government jobs on high paid salaries who still, to this day, are taking up the accommodation in the welfare houses. The houses that are purchased through the Aboriginal Housing Scheme for the needy are being rented by people who are getting $40,000 - $50,000 a year in salary. Some of these families are dual income as well - they are taking home the best part of $80,000 a year and renting the houses that are designed for the low income people. The sad part about it is that these people are depriving the needy families because most of the needy families are being deprived and living in overcrowded situations. In some cases, some of the black bureaucrats are living in 4 bedroom houses with only one child.

What should happen in the future - in terms of services to Aboriginal children and families?

The trend in accordance with all of the ACCA's to Aboriginal Children's Services, constitutions and aims and objections, nothing has happened in the minds of Aboriginal and Islander people to change course in striving for autonomy and in that autonomy we don't see that there is any need for the mainstream service to be controlling and managing Aboriginal children's programs. Ultimately, we would see that family services and children's services should be the responsibility of the Aboriginal and Islander community. That's what we are striving for, much to the opposition of bureaucrats. Certainly a lot of those bureaucrats are Aboriginal and Islander people too who don't have faith in the non-government organisations
such as ACCA's.

What about something like the demand for national legislation? Where does that stand, because that has been a long-standing aim for the national organisation. Is that still relevant today?

All of the constitutions, aims and objectives of all of the Agencies is pointing us in the direction, which demands that the Commonwealth take responsibility. They have been given the responsibility through the '67 Referendum to put into place appropriate pieces of legislation that would enhance the quality of life for Aboriginal people in this country, particularly our kids. I don't see why we can't demand from the Federal Government that they put in place national legislation - the legislation that would put so much

pressure on State and Territory Governments to support the principle of Aboriginal autonomy in its children's programs.

Do you see also, as part of that, the fact that you do have closer links with State Departments that is not necessarily argument against having a national system that safeguards the rights of Aboriginal communities to control the rights of their children and families?

I'm not too sure what you mean.

Take, for instance, the Queensland Department of Family and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. They just finished a long process of consultation with the Queensland AICCA's to develop principles with each other - their work. Victorian agencies got similar agreement. The Northern Territory, for instance, has the principle of legislation. Do you see that as having done anything to mitigate the problem? You are saying that in spite of those changes, national legislation needs to occur for a new national system.

Yes I do. From my understanding, what Queensland, Victoria and South Australia have done has not gone far enough to convince me or anyone else that I speak to that it could never happen again.

In conclusion, if you are looking at some very basic principles that you feel underlie what you want to see happen in Aboriginal child welfare, what would they be?

In the national legislation?

Not just in legislation, but generally what happens in this country?

I do believe that the national legislation should be in place. Although we know that the States and Territory Government argue like mad and resist any form of national legislation that is going to prevent them from introducing legislation that would undermine what Aboriginal and Islander people really want from the national legislation. I think that the States still would want to have that control, whereas we understand that they don't want to relinquish any control over any aspects to the Federal Government. We know that autonomy for Aboriginal programs, whether it be ACCA's or housing or health or education programs, is going to have an easy ride because there is always going to be resistance from the States.

Although we may come up with a set of ideals we are going to have to work hard to get an appropriate strategy in place to make sure we can make it happen. Put the pressure on at all levels in the community.

What I was partly referring to when I was referring to the State agreements is that I know that even with the Queensland AICCA's for instance, where they have arrived at a draft paper with the placement principle, they are still unhappy with it and it looks like the best kind of agreement that exists in the country at the moment. My feeling is that no such agreement will be adequate as long as State still has that control over it, which was what you were referring to. It seems to me that until that complete control is handed over, they won't be happy and most other Aboriginal Child Care Agencies won't be either with the situation. Is that what you were saying about the State control.

Yes.

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Appendix II
S. N. A. I. C. C. NATIONAL CONFERENCES 1981- 1993 SUMMARY OF RESOLUTIONS

One of the aims of this thesis was to present the views of Aboriginal people about the child welfare system. I summarise the major issues that have concerned SNAICC over the last twelve years expressed through their national conference resolutions. I will supplement the summary of the resolutions with my own recollections of the meetings I attended. The national conferences and annual general meetings of SNAICC are the supreme decision-making forums for this national umbrella of Aboriginal child welfare organisations. After discussion of particular issues members then vote on resolutions which become policy direction for the SNAICC National Executive and the Secretariat. The National Executive comprises of fourteen members, two from each State and Territory. The resolutions combined with the interviews in the next Chapter will be the major sources of Aboriginal views about the child welfare system and their desires for the future.

1981

This conference set down the original "Aims and Objectives" of SNAICC. However, it was not the first time the formation of a national organisation was discussed.It had been raised at the "First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar" held in Melbourne in 1979[1], in the proceedings of the UN International Year of the Child National Committee[2], and at the Third Australian Conference on Adoption (Adelaide May 1982)[3].

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[1]Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. (VACCA) (1979) If Everyone Cared. The First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar. A Report arising from an International Seminar on Aboriginal Family Life and the Welfare of Aboriginal Children, Melbourne 23rd-25th April 1979.

[2]International Year of the Child. (1979) National Committee of Non Government Orgainsations. Aboriginal Children in Crisis. (Unpublished)p. 41

[3]The resolution from this conference read:

Aboriginal Child Services

The Conference is gravely concerned at the continued failure of Federal and State Welfare Departments and legislators to recognise and respect Aboriginal mores and values in policies, practices and legislation relating to

However, present at this conference were some of the Aboriginal people who were significant actors in a subsequent conference that re-established SNAICC, after a period of relative inactivity. Thus there is continuity between this conference and subsequent ones.

Resolutions at this meeting reflected a concern for the damage being done to Aboriginal children in institutions and called for a "Royal Commission to investigate standards and conditions currently existing in all Government/Voluntary/Church controlled residential care establishments accommodating children separated from their families"[4].

Apart from process issues the delegates saw the formation of SNAICC as safeguarding the survival and well being of present and future generations of Aboriginal & Islander children. It

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Aboriginal children. This failure is reflected in, for example, the application of inappropriate criteria for selection and inappropriae methods of recruitment of, substitute families for Aboriginal children; and its consequences are evidenced in the gross over-representation of Aboriginal children in institutional and substitute care. This Conference is dismayed that the recommendations of the First and second Conferences have not been implemented more fully.

The Conference makes the following recommendations:

a. that the Federal Parliament enact an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Act, in exercise of the power granted by S 51of the Commonwealth Constitution;

b. That the Federal Child Care Act establish a national body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care, incoporating the existing State Aboriginal Child Care Agencies, and staffed by Aboriginal and Islander people;

c. That the national body be responsible for developing guidelines and making decisions with respect to the placement of Aboriginal and Islander children;

d. that the Commonwealth Office of Child Care reinforce the concept of specialist block funding into the community-based A & TSI Child Care Agenices within the Children's Services Programme.

The Conference endorses the principle that the substitute care of children within their own cultural group is in the best interests of the child and recommends:

e. that the placement of Aboriginal children with Aboriginal families be first priority in placement options. This entails active recruitment of Aboriginal families, and cooperation and consultation between all State Welfare Departments, voluntary agencies and the ACCAs in all matters involving Aboriginal children;

f. that educational and social programmes be developed by each State ACCA to support white families (either foster or adoptive) in helping the children in their care to realise Aboriginal identity;

g. that, pending the establishment of a national body, State Welfare Departments implement policies and practices which actively involve the State ACCAs in all matters concerning Aboriginal children.

Oxenberry (Ed.) R. Third Australian Conference on Adoption. (19 May 1982) Conference Recommendations and Statements From the Proceedings. University of Adelaide

[4]SNAICC (1981) Resolutions, National Conference 1981. No. 4.

also called for direct funding to ACCAs from the Federal Government, and for the abolition of all discriminatory laws and by-laws

June 1982, Brisbane

This "Orientation and Training Course" passed a further resolution to establish a national secretariat. It also called for action on a case involving the taking of four Aboriginal children in foster-care overseas by their foster parents without the permission of their natural parents.

November ?

June 1982, Canberra

This was the second national gathering in 1982 and the third conference of AICCA delegates that called for the establishment of SNAICC. The delegates accepted the existing "Aims & Objectives" of SNAICC, including all past resolutions. The meeting called for a review of the practices of the Office of Child Care because of discrepancies in the treatment of AICCAs in various states. It also demanded adequate funding saying that existing levels were only enough to enable AICCAs to provide a "band aid" service that replaced white welfare with black welfare. There was a call to the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) to recognise SNAICC as the experts in Aboriginal child welfare and for a writ to be taken out against the federal Government for not using its' Constitutional powers under clause 51 (26) to over-ride discriminatory State welfare legislation. The meeting also warned Government against using their Aboriginal employees as their sole advisers. State Governments were called on to consult AICCAs about placements, and demands were made for residential establishments for "children in Limbo".[5] This conference clearly established their belief that formal academic qualifications were not a relevant reference for working in the field of Aboriginal child and family welfare. Government refusals to fund unqualified Aboriginal workers in positions usually meant for social workers were fought and won by the AICCAs.

[5]SNAICC (1982)Resolutions. National Conference, 4th & 5th November, 1982. Canberra.

This conference clearly expressed the problems that were preoccupying AICCAs in the early days. These are still issues of concern and they can be grouped into the following categories:

i) internal process issues of SNAICC;

ii) internal process issues of AICCAs;

iii) Relations with State and Federal Governments including legislative, policy and resource issues; and,

iv) topical concerns about the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families.

August-September 1983, Canberra.

This SNAICC National Conference was held after the election of the first Hawke Labor Government. In their manifesto, the ALP had made a commitment to Aboriginal child care agencies to implement their principles, "regarding the care, custody and control of children and the provision of necessary resources to facilitate the development of community-controlled Child care agencies/services within the Aboriginal and Islander community"[6].

The SNAICC national conference placing their demands in the context of the ALP Government's recognition of the principles of self-determination, called on the Government to provide $ 5m to AICCAs to be channelled through SNAICC. They called for consultation on all matters affecting Aboriginal children. Other matters canvassed were the need for a long-term financial commitment to SNAICC, the question of qualifications and the need to recognise Aboriginal skills as equivalent to academic qualifications, the system of advice for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the need to meet with the Prime Minister to inform him about the problems of Aboriginal children.[7]

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[6]Australian Labor Party (ALP) (1984) Platform, Consititution and Rules as approved by the 36th National Conference, Canberra.

[7]SNAICC (1983) Resolutions, National Conference, August-September 1983

March 1984, Townsville

The resolutions at this conference addressed similar issue to previous ones. However, the tone and strength of statements appear to have changed. There is for instance, reference to the "colonialist" governments and a demand for the recognition of the "sovereignty" of Aboriginal and Islander people to ensure the care, custody and control of Aboriginal children. The conference rejected the report of the Social Welfare Administrators on Aboriginal Fostering and Adoption and called for National Aboriginal Child Welfare Legislation. It also insisted on SNAICC and AICCA control over these processes and over Aboriginal employees of State welfare authorities, including a call once again for funds for AICCAs to be channelled through SNAICC. The topical issue which appears to have outraged delegates at this conference involved the advertising of Aboriginal children for fostering in New South Wales. The meeting called for the dismissal of the Minister responsible and for the PM to intervene

December 1984, Adelaide

This was a very important conference from SNAICC's point of view because a number of internal matters required resolution including the definition of a permanent constitution. This was the first national conference I attended as SNAICC Executive Officer. It was a turbulent meeting which resulted in the walk-out of a majority of Queensland member organisations. Nevertheless, important issues were discussed producing a long list of resolutions.

There was significant representation of delegates from WA, the Pitjantjatjara Homelands and rural communities in South Australia. Resolutions thus reflected concerns in these areas including a call for land rights in WA based on the Seaman Land Rights Inquiry, Petrol sniffing amongst Aboriginal children in the Pitjantjatjara communities and support for a SAACCA program in that area.

The conference rejected the Carter Report into the Review of Community Services in WA for inadequate consultation. It condemned the disproportionate rate of institutionalisation of

Aboriginal children and their removal from their communities. It called for the SNAICC Child Placement Principle to be adopted by all levels of government. It emphasised preventative, especially family support services. and continued to support the development of community controlled AICCAs, especially in remote areas. There were also resolutions about the need for family group homes, crisis centres, residential facilities for children at risk and more accommodation to ease the housing crisis.[8]

February 1986, Melbourne

This Conference was preoccupied with internal matters relating to the constitution and structure of SNAICC. The Conference accepted the present amended Statement of Purposes and the Constitution. The rift between SNAICC and the Queensland members was resolved, a matter which was at the bottom of the comparatively long delay between national conferences since Adelaide. The Conference was also combined with a national workshop on issues relevant to the AICCAs. One of the major issues that it did consider was the new Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) rules for grant funding to organisations. Conference rejected the DAA rules relating to grant assistance because they said these "contradicted principles of self-determination, self-management and our indigenous right to control our own lives and destinies"[9].

December 1987, Alice Springs

On the eve of the bicentennial of the Australian nation-state, it is not surprising that this conference concerned itself with actions surrounding the official bicentennial celebrations. The casual remarks by the Prime Minister about a possible "treaty" between Aborigines and the nation-state was the context for a call for proper consultation about this matter and for the recognition of the sovereignty of Aboriginal people by both the Australian Government and the United Kingdom as a precondition for negotiations.

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[8]SNAICC (1984) Resolutions. National Conference December 1984 Adelaide
[9]SNAICC (1986) Resolutions. National Conference Melbourne February 1986

Also of direct concern to the functioning of the AICCAs was a proposed review by the Office of Child Care. The Review was proposed in the framework of the Holding-Grimes Ministerial Agreement of 1986 which had frozen funding to the AICCAs from the Commonwealth. This Agreement said that the Commonwealth felt AICCAs were "fostering an adoption" services-a State responsibility- and therefore appropriately funded by them. The Ministers decided that the level of funding being provided to AICCAs at that time was an adequate level of contribution from the Commonwealth. A resolution was passed calling for the rescinding of this Agreement and for the Federal Government to accept their responsibility to the AICCAs.

Other significant matters discussed were Aboriginal deaths in custody and domestic or family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

February 1989, Canberra

The SNAICC national conference was held immediately after a national conference on the subject of family violence in Aboriginal and Islander communities. At this conference matters about the child welfare and juvenile justice system were reflected in resolutions about residential facilities for children and the representation of children in courts. The subject of resources had by now taken on national dimensions with the Holding-Grimes freeze having a real impact on all AICCAs. SNAICC had proposed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Hon Gerry Hand, in 1987, that he hold a national review of AICCAs to break the impasse that had occurred in the question of funding for AICCAs. Although it did not eventually get under way until late in 1990 due to disagreements about matters such as the Reviewer and the Terms of Reference, it began taking up considerable time at national discussions. One of the resolutions about the review called on SNAICC to pursue the matter of the review and ensure it got underway as soon as possible.

The conference also resolved to set up a Working Party to work towards the implementation of National Aboriginal Child Welfare legislation.

Conference spent time discussing other issues such as the latest draft of the joint report with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence into Aboriginal child poverty, with the author, Christine Choo. The United Nations Draft Convention of the Rights of the Child was also discussed with representatives of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

February 1990, Brisbane

The Constitution reappeared as a significant concern for delegates at this conference although this time the depth of unity was strong enough to avoid a repeat of a split. A working party was organised to discuss the particular issue of representation and membership at the heart of this debate and the conference got onto the second most pressing issue- the national review of AICCAs. The new and powerful player in Aboriginal affairs- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was discussed, as was the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Conference also demanded the Federal Government ratify the new UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Finally, delegates called for an inquiry into the effects of the policies of removal of Aboriginal children, graphically and rather tragically highlighted by the fate of James Savage aka Russel Moore, awaiting trial for rape and murder in Florida, USA..

May 1991, Adelaide

The National Review of AICCAs completed, Adelaide was the first occasion SNAICC members were able to collectively discuss the findings. This matter took up the bulk of the conference without resolution. Conference felt that given that the Review report contained matters and findings that were critical for the future of AICCAs and Aboriginal child and family welfare, decided not to endorse the report and seek a further national discussion in the near future.

The Working Party on the SNAICC Constitution having completed its task, the conference accepted a redrafted Constitution presented to it. The process and the outcome reflected a new stage in the history of the organisation, ten years after it first came together.

February 1992, Canberra, National Review and AGM

This Conference had been funded by ATSIC and the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services. The formers commitment upon condition that SNAICC discuss the Report of the National Review of AICCAs and the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the latter to hear SNAICC's response to the National Review.

Conference came up with a definitive response to the Review after rejecting almost all its recommendation. Delegates were incensed by a proposal by the Department of Health, Housing and Community Services (DHHCS) that the funding of AICCAs be handed over to the States. A background paper said

> **SNAICC proposes a new National A&TSI Children's services Program, funded entirely by the Commonwealth to be taken over eventually by SNAICC. This program would be part of an overall National Agenda/Policy/Plan for A&TSI children and families, with a commitment from the Federal, States and territory Governments to its aims, which would include national legislation and would address all aspects of the needs of A&TSI children. This position of the AICCAs reflects a continuing lack of confidence in the desire and ability of State and Territory Governments to do the right thing for A&TSI children. It further identifies the safest location (for the AICCAs) within the Commonwealth arena, while allowing a partnership to develop between AICCAs and State/Territory Governments based on respect for the local A&TSI community in which the AICCA is based.**[10]

May 1993, Launceston

1993 was the tenth anniversary of the secretariat based in Melbourne. Conference paid tribute to all the Aboriginal people who had contributed to the well being and advancement of Aboriginal children.

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[10]SNAICC (1992) Background Paper to Recommendations - as amended by SNAICC- of the National Review of AICCAs. From National Conference, February 1992. Canberra.

Once again issues like Child abuse and family violence and were an important part of the conference. The National Review, however continued to dominate. By this conference ATSIC had made a general commitment to SNAICC that it would not hand over funding of the AICCAs to the States. ATSIC representatives however, sought clarification of exactly what SNAICC wanted. The conference produced the following:

broad principles regarding the future of AICCAs:

•state governments were not to have funding of AICCAs;
•any future developments were to occur in the framework of national legislation and national policy;
•transfer of funds being provided to the States from Commonwealth to SNAICC and the AICCAs;
•that DHHCS continue to play a role in his field; and an
•increase in funds to AICCAs to take into account the 7 year freeze.[11]

Summary

The following themes arise from the analysis of the SNAICC national conference resolutions:

A. That there has been a clarity and consistency in demands of SNAICC based on perusal of their resolutions.

B. That these are linked to aspirations for sovereignty, self-determination, community-control and land rights.

C. There are repeated demands for National Aboriginal Child Welfare Legislation and for funding to be channelled through SNAICC to the AICCAs, including increased funding.

D. That there is continuing concern about the operations of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in relation to Aboriginal children, reflected through resolutions calling for consultation and condemnation of actions of States. This linked to an insistence that the

[11]SNAICC (1993) Resolutions. National Conference. Launceston. May 1993.

Commonwealth remain, indeed strengthen its role in relation to Aboriginal child and family welfare.

E. Calls for changes are made to the highest levels of political authority underlining Fleras' assertion, "so too aboriginal groups have moved beyond the narrow view of themselves as a minority. In its place have evolved a commitment to dialogue on a nation-to-state basis with larger society"[12].

F. There are many specific calls for control of facilities and processes.

G. AICCAs and SNAICC continue to be concerned about matters other than purely child welfare matters.

The call for National Aboriginal Child Welfare Legislation and persistent condemnation of State Governments shows a desire for a system of indigenous child welfare that is separate from the present State and Territory based system. It is also evident that SNAICC views a system of indigenous child welfare in the context of recognition of other indigenous rights. Demands are also unequivocal about control over resources and funding being with Aboriginal people.

[12]Fleras, Augie. & Elliot, Jean Leonard. (1992). The 'Nations Within': Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. Oxford University Press.