



## Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **SNAICC Chairperson launches new assessment tool to assist Aboriginal kinship carers**

SNAICC Chairperson Dawn Wallam has launched a groundbreaking new tool to empower Aboriginal kinship carers to identify needs, develop action plans and improve outcomes for children.

The Winangay Aboriginal Kinship Care Assessment Tool, launched in Redfern today, was developed by the Winangay Resources team headed by Aunty Sue Blacklock with Paula Hayden and Gillian Bonser, with support from Flic Ryan and Karen Menzies.

The new resources include plain English questions for conversational interviews with existing kinship carers; and pictorial cards to rate carer strengths and identify concerns and unmet needs. From these, a joint action plan is developed between workers and carers to support the family and improve outcomes for children.

Speaking at the launch, Ms Wallam said that in June 2010, there were 35,895 children in out-of-home care in Australia — 11,468, or 32 per cent, of these were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children.

“SNAICC is deeply concerned about the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families for child protection reasons and too many of these children are being placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families,” Ms Wallam said.

She said the new culturally-appropriate resources would provide much-needed assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, many whom live in disadvantage but are willing to share what they have to keep the children connected with their family

“The tool is groundbreaking and will result in a new way of working that will redefine best practice, requiring workers to work collaboratively with carers, identifying their strengths, as together they find ways of building carers’ capacity,” Ms Wallam said.

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“It will lead to a redistribution of power from worker to kinship carers and ensure Aboriginal kinship carers and kids are heard.

“At the heart of this tool, is the belief that Aboriginal people have a right to be respectfully assessed using culturally appropriate tools, which are administered by culturally appropriate workers.

“The use of Winangay has the potential to reduce the numbers of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal care and to contribute to closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and families.”

The Winangay project team collaborated with an Aboriginal reference group of OOHC workers, the NSW peak body AbSec, and the NSW Children’s Guardian; and received support of key academics, including Marilyn McHugh (UNSW) and Marianne Berry from the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

Workers, kinship carers and children from remote areas such as the Kimberley in WA, rural locations like Orange (NSW), and capital cities including Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Perth piloted these resources and contributed to the further refinement of the tool.

“My service, Yorganop (in Perth) was involved in the first pilot group,” Ms Wallam said.

“We were attracted by its collaborative approach, the engaging visuals and the culturally appropriate approach. We were also delighted to support a tool that has come from the grassroots up rather than from the government down.

For more information: Paula Hayden (Winangay Resources Team)  
mob: (0421) 912 757; Paula@winangay.com.au  
Giuseppe Stramandinoli (SNAICC Media Officer)  
mob: (0419) 508 125