



## Get involved in National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day!

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) is fast approaching. And this year it's all about stepping up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights.

Held on 4 August each year, NAICD celebrates the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within family and community.

This year's theme is *Right Here, Right Now. Our Rights Matter.*

The theme seeks to support our children by increasing public awareness about:

- major human rights concerns that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across the country; and
- the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as First Peoples of this country.

It also aims to support local events to celebrate children, assist better understanding about what their rights mean and how communities can work better to ensure that all children have the opportunity to live these rights every day.

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## Megan Mitchell to open SNAICC conference

The new National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell, has confirmed she will be attending SNAICC's Fifth National Conference in June.

Ms Mitchell will officially open the three-day conference — the biggest children's forum in the southern hemisphere — in Cairns on 4 June. She will also participate in a yarning session with state and territory children's commissioners.

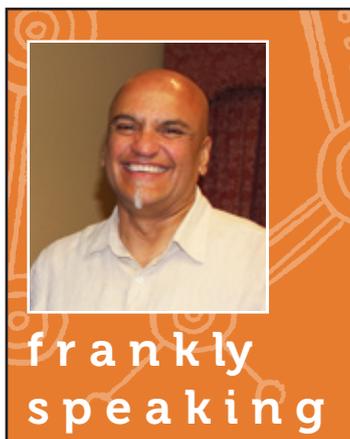
Ms Mitchell has been appointed for five years and will be based at the Australian Human Rights Commission in Sydney.

Speaking with *SNAICC News*, Ms Mitchell said a priority as Commissioner would be to listen directly to children and give them a greater voice. She will officially launch *The Big Banter*, her national 'listening tour', at the SNAICC conference.

Read the interview with Ms Mitchell — pages 8 and 9.



National Children's Commissioner, Megan Mitchell



**Dear reader, welcome to the May 2013 edition of SNAICC News.**

SNAICC continues to bubble along with clear direction and much enthusiasm. Over the last three months, we have restructured the organisation to enable greater coordination. We have produced several new resources (covered in the latter half of this newsletter) and continued to deal with major issues, including the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care system and the too-common practice of placing them away from family and community.

In response to this issue, SNAICC has joined with the Healing Foundation, and peak bodies AbSec (NSW) and QATSICPP

(Queensland) to generate a focus and energy around understanding the causes and finding solutions to reduce this rate of removal. Titled *Step Up!*, the campaign aims to examine both policy and practice responses as well as opportunities for local communities to find and implement their own solutions.

We hope to work across the sector, with mainstream NGOs and government, to create the appropriate supports and funding base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to design, develop and deliver the right programs for their communities. We hope to launch the campaign/conversation at SNAICC's national conference in Cairns in June.

Once the framework has been agreed, we will approach the many mainstream NGO friends we have to assist with lobbying, raising awareness, campaign funding and talking to government in regard to taking a different approach to policy and program development and implementation — one which sees the direct input of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of the process.

In parallel to work on STEP UP! SNAICC will revisit the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) as inseparable from the issues

of out-of-home care in so far as we want children kept as close to community and family as possible. Of course we also continue to argue that as a result of the last 225 years of colonisation, far more needs to be done on preventative work with families and communities to repair the damage, enable healing and support the building of a more community-engaged and determined future.

Coming up very quickly is SNAICC's 5th national conference. The conference promises to be a great gathering of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and other peoples from all over this land and waters, as well as international experts. Our last conference was, we believe, a great success. This time we plan to do even better! See pages 18 and 19 for more information.

On the National Executive front, it is my pleasure to inform readers that Sharron Williams was elected Chairperson of SNAICC on a permanent basis at the last National Executive meeting in March.

Sharron replaces Dawn Wallam, who has stepped down from the role due to work commitments but remains on our National Executive.

I would like to thank Dawn for her dedication and professionalism in her time as chairperson. I look forward to working with Sharron and the rest of the National Executive in continuing to promote and protect the rights of children and families.

**Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO**  
frank.hytten@snaicc.org.au

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## I NEED YOUR SUPPORT

to make SNAICC a stronger peak body for us children by becoming a member. Call Sandy Barber on (03) 9489 8099 today!



## Support services are being established for people wishing to participate in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

In April, the Australian Government announced \$44 million in funding for counselling and support services for participants of the Royal Commission.

The Government is seeking applications from eligible organisations to apply for funding to deliver specialist services such as counselling, support and case management to individuals and affected family members before, during and after their engagement with the Royal Commission.

"This Government will do everything it can to make sure that what happened to children in the past is not allowed to happen again, and is committed to doing everything it can to help survivors of past abuse receive support and justice," Prime Minister Gillard said.

The Royal Commission — comprising six Commissioners, pictured on this page — held its first hearing in Melbourne on 3 April.

Led by Justice Peter McClellan AM, the Royal Commission is inquiring into how institutions with a responsibility for children have managed and responded to allegations and instances of child sexual abuse and related matters.

The Commission is investigating where systems have failed to protect children, and will make recommendations on how to improve laws, policies and practices to prevent and better respond to child sexual abuse in institutions.

The Australian Government has also provided funding to establish a free national legal advisory service for people needing legal advice or assistance to help them tell their story to the Commission.

The service will provide advice on the legal implications of providing statements and other forms of evidence as well as with general legal inquiries about dealing with the Royal Commission.

The service will not represent people appearing before the Commission but will offer referral advice and advice on accessing financial assistance for legal representation.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Legal Services (NATSILS) peak body asserts



## Support services announced as Royal Commission gets under way

**"This Government will do everything it can to make sure that what happened to children in the past is not allowed to happen again, and is committed to doing everything it can to help survivors of past abuse receive support and justice."**

— Prime Minister Julia Gillard

there is a critical need for culturally-competent legal assistance services to guide and assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their engagement with the Royal Commission.

NATSILS says it is unclear at this stage how culturally accessible the mainstream legal advisory service will be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services have long-standing relationships of trust built up with their local communities and have the expertise to best assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the Royal Commission," NATSILS Chairperson Shane Duffy said.

"We are currently in discussions with the Commonwealth Government as to how they can better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services around the country to provide the necessary assistance to victims

throughout the Royal Commission. Despite this, NATSILS would still encourage anyone with questions about the Royal Commissions to contact their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service."

Mr Duffy said the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participate in the Royal Commission may be very high, "given their long and painful history with government and non-government institutions."

SNAICC is currently liaising with state and territory peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection and welfare services to set up and maintain communication channels about the Royal Commission's processes, as well as funding and support opportunities for Aboriginal and Islander people who wish to be involved in the Royal Commission.

### For more information

The Royal Commission can be contacted on 1800 099 340.

[www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au)

SNAICC also has a section on our website dedicated to the Royal Commission: [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

Information about Royal Commission support services is available at [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au), or by emailing [rcsupportservices@fahcsia.gov.au](mailto:rcsupportservices@fahcsia.gov.au)

See also, Adults Surviving Child Abuse: [www.asca.org.au](http://www.asca.org.au)

# Meet our new National Executive members

**SNAICC has two new National Executive members following elections held in November 2012 — Maureen Mossman from Cairns and Lisa Thorpe from Melbourne.**

Maureen Mossman is a descendant of the Gungandji people, and was born in Ayr to a large family of nine children. She has lived in Cairns for decades, although she grew up in north Queensland's Burdekin region.

Maureen has an extensive history working with children, both as a fully qualified teacher, and also as a teacher's assistant for over 25 years at the local Boopa-Werem Kindergarten, where she continues to work today.

In addition, Maureen has held a post at Wuchopperren Health Services as an Elder and served as a Director on Wuchopperren's Board of Management since 2000. It is in this role that she joins the SNAICC National Executive.

Through her many years of experience working with children, Maureen has seen first hand the key issues affecting children in her kindergarten and her community.

She believes the most important issues requiring urgent attention are family violence, poor health and nutrition, and parental neglect.

Maureen believes there should be more parental guidance workshops where parents are taught to take basic care of their children. She believes that community involvement is also very important, and sees a need for community leaders to step in and speak to the parents and carers when early intervention may be required.

Through her involvement with SNAICC, Maureen hopes to be able to learn more about the organisation and subsequently take this knowledge back to her community to share with others. She hopes that this partnership will help to



*Maureen Mossman*



*Lisa Thorpe*

build a better world for our children.

Lisa Thorpe is an Aboriginal woman from the Gunditjmarra and Gunnai nations of south-eastern Australia. Lisa was born in Yallourn, Victoria, but has spent most of her life in Melbourne. Her primary work experience has been in Aboriginal-specific community-based and controlled organisations and programs that have contributed to the provision of services to Aboriginal people.

Lisa has a strong focus on community development in the area of Aboriginal early years and community empowerment.

Lisa is currently employed at Deakin University's Institute of Koorie Education as an Associate Professor. Her role at the institute varies from community research development to coordination of the university's Bachelor of Early Childhood Education course.

Lisa is also Chairperson of the Bubup Wilam for Early Learning Aboriginal Children and Family Centre, located at Thomastown, in Melbourne's north.

The centre opened its doors in February 2012, one of 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres being established across the country.

In other changes on the SNAICC National Executive, Desley Thompson has been elected Deputy Chairperson — Child Welfare, succeeding Bill Pritchard, who is no longer on the National Executive.

Lisa Coulson was elected as Treasurer and Elvie Sandow as Secretary.



## Angela Webb the new CEO of AbSec

**AbSec, the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in NSW, has appointed Angela Webb as its new Chief Executive Officer.**

Ms Webb replaces Bill Pritchard, who has moved to a new position in northern NSW. Mr Pritchard was CEO of AbSec since 2007, and also on the SNAICC National Executive since May 2001. He was elected SNAICC Deputy Chairperson — Child Welfare in November 2012.

"Angela brings vast experience working in both the Government and non-government sector, and across both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies," AbSec Chairperson Dana Clarke said.

"Joining AbSec in 2009, Angela has been an integral part of the growth and development of AbSec, and actively participates and supports capacity building within our Aboriginal agencies and communities."

"Angela is a proud Aboriginal woman, and a descendant of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr people of the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, who has chosen a career path in working for our Aboriginal children and families."

Ms Webb and AbSec Deputy Chairperson Amanda Bridge will replace Mr Pritchard as the agency's representatives on the SNAICC National Executive.

**Four new Aboriginal agencies given accreditation to run out-of-home care services in NSW — see page 11.**

# New report reveals situation for children in care is worsening

**The latest report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) on child protection in Australia reveals an already serious situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care is getting worse.**

Figures show that one-third of all children in out-of-home-care in Australia are Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander and that our children are eight times more likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect.

“This is simply not acceptable,” SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said.

“The financial cost of these continued policy failures is considerable. But the human cost to the individual children, their families and communities is devastating — and it will impact on generations to come.

“New approaches are needed to improve the protection and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children — with the active participation of our families and communities.”

Ms Williams said current approaches had not worked, as the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into contact with child protection systems in the states and territories continues to grow at an alarming rate.

“Addressing the underlying causes that lead to child abuse and neglect is at the core of improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families,” Ms Williams said.

“Our children and families continue to experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage in health, education and housing.

“Any long-term and sustainable solutions to our children’s welfare must be based on ensuring the basic needs of our children and families are met.”

She said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must be empowered to participate in a meaningful way in the design and delivery of programs that affect their lives.

“A greater focus must be placed on early intervention and prevention measures — improving access to Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander community-based early childhood, child care, family support and child welfare programs.

“We need to recognise and build on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities to support and nurture their children.

“It is important to support and build on the successes of intensive family support services, integrated early childhood services, the increased focus on healing and reviving cultural identity and pride, and increased community action to protect and care for children,” Ms Williams said.

The AIHW report also reveals that once in care, many of our children are losing connection with family, community and culture. SNAICC continues to advocate for the need to improve the way the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is applied in each state and territory.

The principle is crucial to meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s rights to remain connected with their extended family, community and cultural heritage.

“The principle must be strengthened, particularly in the Northern Territory, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, where a high percentage of our children are being placed with non-Indigenous caregivers,” Ms Williams said.

“Until we stem the tide of our children

## Latest figures at a glance

- At 30 June 2012, there were 13,299 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia — or 33.6 per cent of all children in care. The rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was 10 times the rate for other children.
- In 2011–12, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were almost 8 times as likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse and neglect as non-Indigenous children (rates of 41.9 and 5.4 per 1,000) children, respectively).
- Overall, the most common type of substantiated abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was neglect (40 per cent of substantiations); sexual abuse was the least common (9 per cent).
- Across Australia, 69 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were placed with relatives/kin, other Indigenous caregivers or in Indigenous residential care.

— From *Child Protection Australia 2011–12*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

being placed in out-of-home care— and improve the chances of children in care remaining connected with their families and culture — Australia faces the bleak prospect of another Stolen Generation.”



**ABOVE:** SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams says new approaches are urgently needed to improve protection and wellbeing of our children and families.

# Research into effective transition to school



Children play at the Boopa Werem Kindergarten in Cairns. SNAICC is consulting schools and services running programs to assist children in the transition to school. Photo by Kath Steffensen-Gibson.

**Beginning school is an exciting time for children and families, full of new opportunities and challenges. The transition period lays the foundation for children's future learning and engagement with school, and is a key time in which to build relationships between children, families and schools.**

These challenges and opportunities are accentuated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, who experience higher vulnerability and exclusion in early childhood. It is therefore crucial that we understand what helps to support a positive transition to school for our children.

SNAICC recently conducted a review of the literature on this topic, exploring what constitutes ready Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities, early childhood services and schools. A number of key principles emerged from the review, as follows:

- **Holistic:** Transition programs must focus on more than just children's academic skills, but also prepare children socially and emotionally for the school environment. Programs

also need to enable schools' readiness to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

- **Relationships:** Building positive, respectful and trusting relationships between all parties — children, families, early childhood educators, community members and schools — is key to successful and sustainable programs.
- **Strengths-based:** Programs must recognise and build from the strengths of our children, families and communities.
- **Participation:** All stakeholders must play an active and meaningful role in the process — for example schools can support parents and families to provide input into the school curriculum, and school teachers and early childhood educators can work together to share information and design joint programs.
- **Context specific:** Each community is different, so programs need to be

specifically tailored to meet local needs.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:** Involving Indigenous staff in the transition process helps families to feel culturally safe, encourages and supports their participation, and is crucial in building relationships.
- **Cultural competence:** Transition programs, schools and early childhood centres need to be culturally competent. This means, among other things, that they visibly represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and they respect and value Indigenous knowledge, ways of learning and being.

SNAICC is exploring how these principles operate in action, consulting with services and schools that are running effective transition programs. For more information, or to let SNAICC know of a successful program, please get in touch with Holly Mason-White ([holly.mason-white@snaicc.org.au](mailto:holly.mason-white@snaicc.org.au)) or (03) 9489 8099.

## Get involved in national children's day!

Continued from page 1

SNAICC wants to work with communities and all organisations — Indigenous and mainstream — to make sure this year's children's day is the biggest and most successful yet.

We hope the day will provide the opportunity for Australians to come together to discuss critical issues impacting on our children and work together to improve mutual understanding and to see change happen.

As in previous years, SNAICC will hold a national launch (in Melbourne) to celebrate the day and assist organisations across Australia to hold local events.

SNAICC is developing a range of resources for children and adults. These include:

- a glossy National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day poster
- a series of seven posters on child rights and a children's activity book to accompany the posters
- an educator's guide on facilitating child rights workshops with children, and
- children's day goodies bag (including stickers, arm bands, pencils and more).

These resources will be available from

June for purchase at low cost, with 10 children's packs and one educator's guide also provided free to SNAICC members.

For more information, go the SNAICC website: [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

Child rights are everybody's business. So get planning for your own community event on 4 August to celebrate National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day.

Celebrating children's day, however, is just the first step. We'll also be providing ideas to help your organisation develop a plan on how you can step up for children's rights this year.

The time to step up is now!

# More participation is the key to change in Queensland — SNAICC

**In a submission to the Queensland Child Protection Inquiry, SNAICC has called for greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in service design and delivery.**

The SNAICC submission supports calls by the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) for the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled child and family wellbeing 'hubs' across the state.

These services could empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to design and deliver a range of integrated primary, secondary and tertiary services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

The hubs would contribute to a shift in focus to supporting and strengthening families and communities to care for their own children, reducing the need for statutory intervention.

SNAICC has recommended a significant change in the way child protection services are funded to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies are resourced in line with the level of need for child and family support in our communities in Queensland.

SNAICC also recommended the delegation of a range of statutory functions to Indigenous agencies because our families and communities are best placed to make decisions about the care and placement of their own children.

SNAICC urged the child protection inquiry to make strong recommendations that support our families and communities to bring up children safe and strong in their culture.

In its submission to the inquiry, QATSICPP observed current strategies for dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their children at risk were "manifestly not working."

"The data proves this; there is an ever-increasing number of Indigenous children inside the State's child protection system, to the point today where the number of these children as a proportion of all children in care is scandalous and unacceptable."

QATSICPP recommended its Child and Family Wellbeing Program as a "rational and better value for money" alternative to the present system since it gives priority to early intervention measures.

"Intelligent interventions that are aimed at getting 'ahead of the curve' by reducing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 'in care', supplemented by reunifying strategies, will reduce financial costs to the Government and will also be a benefit to family functioning," QATSICPP wrote.

## **RAATSICC submission**

Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care (RAATSICC) Advisory Association is the main advisory body on children and family matters for north Queensland communities.

In its submission, RAATSIC said the Commission and the Government "urgently needs to acknowledge the different cultural, economic and social influences that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and families in (north) Queensland."

These include issues such as the "tyranny of distance", lack of access to regular services that other Queenslanders enjoyed in large regional and urban centres, as well as the strong cultural bonds of communities and families.

RAATSICC said Commissioner Carmody had acknowledged that different approaches were needed across Queensland.

RAATSICC again called for child, youth and family programs to be placed and co-ordinated under "the one roof" and the



*CEO of RAATSICC,  
Desley Thompson*



*CEO of QATSICPP,  
Natalie Lewis*

creation of Child Protection Committees (CPCs) and a Professional Action Group.

The CPCs would comprise well-respected persons within their community to provide cultural knowledge specific to community and families; and the action group would consist of professional notifiers — such as clinics, schools and police services — and provide an appropriate entry point for children or families that come to the attention of the particular agency.

## **Wuchopperen submission**

In its submission to the inquiry's discussion paper, the Cairns-based Wuchopperen Health Service said it supported the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection to the Indigenous community-controlled sector and would welcome the opportunity to take a leading role in the transition.

"Child protection interventions could be better delivered by the (non-government) sector except in circumstances that require police intervention. Child protection and police legislation needs to correspond so that police can remove perpetrator rather than children having to be removed," Wuchopperen wrote.

The agency argues the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system could best be addressed through an intensive and adequately-resourced 'family case management' model.



*Left: The Honourable Tim Carmody SC heads the Queensland Commission of Inquiry into the child protection system. Commissioner Carmody is required to provide a detailed report to the Queensland Premier by 30 June 2013.*

**Megan Mitchell was raised by a single mother in Sydney, became a school teacher and trained as a psychologist. For the past ten years Ms Mitchell has worked in child protection, the juvenile justice and children's services, including the last three years as NSW Commissioner for Children and Young People.**

**Recently, Ms Mitchell (pictured) spoke with SNAICC News about her new role as National Children's Commissioner.**



## New National Children's Commissioner vows to **Listen to the children**

**Q: What do you see as the main functions of the job?**

Megan Mitchell: They are actually set out in the legislation. I see my main roles as being a national advocate for the rights and interests of children, and to develop and embed mechanisms that ensure a focus on children's interests and enable their participation in decisions that affect them. And to provide leadership and coordination nationally on issues involving child rights, especially where consistency and quality differences across the states and territories are detrimental to children.

And there is also an explicit role in the legislation of promoting child rights, educating the community and children themselves about children's rights.

**Q: Have you had a chance to assess what your initial priorities might be?**

MM: Obviously it's very early in the piece. I've been talking to a lot of people, including members of SNAICC, about how I might determine those priorities because children's needs are diverse and their experiences are diverse and there are a lot of issues out there.

One of the things I really need to be able to do is to focus on where I can really make a difference and where I can work with others to make that difference.

Certainly the legislation allows me to focus on more vulnerable groups and that's something that's coming up quite clearly in the conversations so far. But my first priority is to actually conduct a listening tour around Australia so

that I can find out what people think I should be doing, including with children themselves. And from that to be able to set out a set of early priorities that I can deliver on.

**Q: How will you go about listening directly to children?**

MM: The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which basically underpins the work that I do, specifically sets out participation and involvement in decision making as a fundamental right of children.

And I believe that actually protecting that right is of benefit to all of us. We get it right more often when we talk to children about things that impact on them than if we don't.

And there are lots of ways to listen to children and young people. And I said before, children are diverse so it's important that we don't treat them as if they are all in the same 'bucket', and that we think about the different groups of children differently and we make sure that we organise opportunities for them to input in different ways.

In terms of the listening tour, I want to actually go and visit with schools, communities, and places where kids are that mightn't usually get a voice – like juvenile justice centres, like residential facilities – and I'm even hoping to get to some of the immigration detention facilities as well, to talk to children. To

say 'I'm here, I'm here to listen to what you have to say and I'm here to act on what you have to say if I can'.

We are also going to conduct online surveys so that we can reach as many kids as possible. And clearly I need to speak to other people in this children's space such as SNAICC, and the children's commissioners around the states and territories.

Many already have existing relationships with groups of children or they've done surveys recently of children's needs. I'll be tapping into whatever I can that's already out there but I also want to have my own direct engagement with children and young people.

**Q: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face many major issues, including very high numbers in out-of-home care and the juvenile justice. How do you see your role in trying to reduce those rates?**

MM: I definitely do see that I have a role along with others to try and address those issues. There are much poorer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children than non-Indigenous children in these areas. I know for instance they're 7.5 times more likely to be the subject of substantiated harm or abuse and 33 per cent of all children in care are actually Indigenous children. So they're 10 times more likely to be placed in care.

What we need to be doing is to be working

with families and with those children much earlier on so that we can avoid going into those tertiary systems at all — which we know universally don't provide great outcomes for kids and often get repeated through the generations. So breaking that cycle of disadvantage and experiences in tertiary care and justice systems will be a really important priority for me.

I've already joined forces with (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) Mick Gooda, who's just down the hall, in his work on justice re-investment, which is a big project he's got going. So that you're shifting resources from the end, that's about detention and jail, into intervention and diversionary programs for children, so that children don't enter those systems or that they only just touch on those systems.

Because my experience in running juvenile justice systems and care and protection systems is that those experiences only serve to entrench criminal identity and associations and they don't actually fix the fundamental problems which go back to people's home life, their engagement in education and positive community activities.

**Q: Such is the magnitude of issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that SNAICC has argued for a dedicated national deputy children's commissioner to advocate on their behalf. Your thoughts?**

MM: Given what we've just talked about in terms of the very poor outcomes for Indigenous children compared to non-Indigenous children, dedicated resources in this area would be absolutely welcome. And it's good to see that in the Victorian context that's something that is occurring. Given that a lot of these activities happen in the state sphere, I'd really be keen to see also other states and territories take that up.

Obviously at the Commonwealth level that hasn't happened as yet. In the meantime, I'll work with my colleagues like Mick Gooda to make sure those issues are covered as best as I can.

**Q: What do you see as key opportunities for changing policy and practice in relation to all disadvantaged children, and in particular Indigenous children?**

MM: Obviously one of my key areas that I want to change is to embed children's

**“The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which basically underpins the work that I do, specifically sets out participation and involvement in decision making as a fundamental right of children. And I believe that actually protecting that right is of benefit to all of us. We get it right more often when we talk to children about things that impact on them than if we don't.”**

**— Megan Mitchell**

participation as part of the normal systemic review of practices, policies and programs so that we can feed those children's voices into program review and design. And the benefit of that is manifold. Not only do we benefit from programs that actually work for kids, as opposed to work for adults, we actually also increase children's agency, we help them get ownership over the kinds of things they're participating in.

I've seen quite a few examples of programs that are designed with kids that have much greater efficacy and outcomes because they engaged them in the outcomes.

So normalising that participation agenda is really important.

I think there are opportunities with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to improve systems and organisations that better protect children. So keep them free of abuse and neglect but also ensure that everybody is aware of children and children's safety in those organisational and institutional settings and they have all the good policies and practices in place that keep children safe.

I think that's a real opportunity get further system reform so that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.

**Q: What are some of the other strategies you have to work on Indigenous children's issues?**

MM: I've been very fortunate so far. There is so much goodwill from parts of

the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Obviously SNAICC has engaged with me early and provided me with some opportunities to participate in the conference that's coming up in Cairns. And, as a result of that, I'm participating in a forum with young people and other state and territory commissioners (for children and young people.)

SNAICC has also organised for when I'm up in Cairns to visit a local community, Yarrabah, and a school and an early childhood centre as well.

And I've also been introduced by Mick Gooda to the NPY Women's Council who have invited me to their community to meet with them and some children.

And there are other opportunities emerging for me across the nation to engage with Aboriginal children and young people, which I'm very excited about.

**Q: Are there any lessons you can draw on in your new role from your time as NSW Commissioner for Children?**

MM: I'd say one of the things that we could have done better at the NSW Commission was engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

So, having this early engagement with SNAICC and others, as the National Children's Commissioner, is going to make that journey so much richer and deeper and real, in terms of forming good and trusting relationships with Aboriginal communities and also with the children in them.

There were some areas that I think we did have some good success with in the NSW context. For example, I think you can see the figures improving slightly in terms of numbers of children in juvenile detention there.

There was some good advocacy around the review of the Young Offenders Act and the Bail Act in NSW and a number of changes to practices and policies there have hopefully meant more diversion from the justice system for young people.

That was something I think particularly impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

# Helping to keep families together in Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta



**The major agency for Aboriginal children and families in South Australia, Aboriginal Family Support Services Inc (AFSS), is helping to meet the growing needs of Aboriginal people in the remote towns of Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta.**

AFSS has provided services in Coober Pedy, 840 kms north of Adelaide, for just over eight years. Initially the service focused on the recruitment and assessment of Aboriginal foster families for the placement of children and young people.

The ability to place children in a family-based placement — which keeps them close to home and connected to their culture, language and identity — is very important. This connection is enshrined in the Children’s Protection Act and Regulations — in particular, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

Today, AFSS’s provides a range of services to the Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta communities. This includes family-based foster care, the Stronger Families Safer Children program (focusing on early intervention and the reunification of families), the Safe Pathways Program (a family violence awareness and prevention program), Financial Counseling (supported through the Coober Pedy Multicultural Affairs Forum) and Emergency Relief.

Both Coober Pedy and the more remote town of Oodnadatta (270 kms to the north) are home to significant Aboriginal populations. Coober Pedy in particular is host to large transient groups of Aboriginal people who come from many areas across middle Australia for health or other reasons. Increased numbers of people in Coober

Pedy require increased levels of service delivery that focus on family preservation and the safety of children and young people.

AFSS works closely with locals and transient groups to improve the capacity of families to keep their children and young people safe and out of harm’s way.

“What started out as a single service has quickly developed into a range of wrap-around services for Aboriginal people living in both Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta,” says AFSS CEO (and SNAICC Chairperson) Sharron Williams.

“AFSS is the only Aboriginal service in Coober Pedy whose work involves Aboriginal family preservation, keeping families safe and strong and ultimately keeping Aboriginal families together.”

AFSS Coober Pedy is managed by Susie Crisa, who brings a wealth of local knowledge and experience to AFSS. Her team of eight staff works closely with Aboriginal families and other service providers in town to deliver services.

The recruitment, assessment, training and support of local Aboriginal foster carers is a full-time focus in Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta. It is crucial that Aboriginal children and young people

who have been removed from their immediate family are able to be placed locally to ensure their continuing connection to culture.

Another AFSS program, Safe Pathways, is funded by FaHCSIA and employs two staff who work with the Coober Pedy Council, Uniting Care Wesley Country SA, Families SA, the Coober Pedy area school and other agencies to provide programs for Aboriginal men, women and children around domestic violence.

One of many programs offered weekly is the Active Girls Group, which provides young Aboriginal women an opportunity to come together in a safe environment and participate in activities and events. Information and awareness — including how to access relevant resources and services — around family violence and associated issues are woven into each group meeting.

AFSS offers similar programs under the Safe Pathways program that work with Aboriginal children, young people and men. Each program aims to ensure that participants are actively engaged in activities and events but, more importantly, are able to seek information about family violence and access family violence services.



*From left to right: AFSS staff Helen Bayet and Anna Tsakiridis and Kayleen O’Toole from Umoona Tjutagku Health Service looking after an AFSS Foster Carer Recruitment Stall in Coober Pedy.*



*A ceremony in Sydney on 26 March included representatives of the four Aboriginal agencies given OOHC accreditation, AbSec CEO Angela Webb and Minister Pru Goward.*

## Four new Aboriginal agencies to deliver out-of-home care services in NSW

**The transfer of out-of-home care (OOHC) services in NSW to non-government agencies has taken a major step forward with four new Aboriginal community organisations receiving provisional accreditation to deliver OOHC services.**

The Aboriginal Medical Service Western Sydney OOHC, Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation Myimbarr OOHC, Wandiyali ATSI Inc and Wundarra Residential Care were presented with certificates of provisional accreditation from the NSW Children’s Guardian in Sydney on 26 March.

Speaking at a ceremony at Parliament House, the new CEO of AbSec, Angela Webb described the latest accreditations as a “significant achievement for Aboriginal people in NSW.”

“It signifies a new way forward for the provision of OOHC services for Aboriginal children and young people, and recognises that Aboriginal people and their communities have a fundamental right, knowledge and capabilities to provide culturally-appropriate services that in the future will lead to better life outcomes for our children.”

Ms Webb said just over a year ago there were seven AbSec member agencies either accredited or in the quality improvement program, providing placements for around

**“It signifies a new way forward for the provision of OOHC services for Aboriginal children and young people, and recognises that Aboriginal people and their communities have a fundamental right, knowledge and capabilities to provide culturally-appropriate services that in the future will lead to better life outcomes for our children.”**

**— Angela Webb, AbSec CEO**

350 children and young people.

“As we stand here today, a bare 12 months later, there are now 10 AbSec member agencies accredited or in quality improvement,” Ms Webb told the audience.

“In addition, there are another six formal partnerships being developed between accredited non-government agencies and Aboriginal organisations that will be developed in coming years.

“We are now looking at a sector that is providing services to over 700 children and young people — 700 children and young people cared for by Aboriginal

carers, supported by Aboriginal staff and connected to either existing or developing Aboriginal agencies.

“Getting to this point has been no mean feat. It has been done in the context of the demands of the rapidly changing out of home care sector.

“The work of these agencies in becoming accredited has been critical in increasing and strengthening the Aboriginal outof home care sector.”

NSW Minister for Family and Community Services Pru Goward said accreditation of the four Aboriginal organisations “recognises the capacity and commitment of these agencies to support Aboriginal children and their families.”

“Having an Aboriginal agency deliver out-of-home care services to Aboriginal children ensures their culture is retained and helps recognise the importance and value of family, extended family, kinship networks, and community, in raising Aboriginal children,” Minister Goward said.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, at 30 June 2012 there were 5,991 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of home care in NSW — representing almost 35 per cent of all children in the state’s care.

# Family support services no longer a Ridge too far

**Two new centres are providing much-needed support services for Aboriginal children and families at Brewarrina and Lightning Ridge, in north-western New South Wales.**

The centres are part of 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres (CFCs) being established across the country by the Australian Government under a partnership agreement with state-territory governments.

The centre at Brewarrina is called Ngunnhu, Waroos and Booris Place of Learning — from the local Ngemba language, it translates as ‘Fisheries, Little People and Children’.

Operating out of temporary premises, the centre currently has three staff — a community liaison officer, a family support officer and an administration officer — and provides a number of services for local families.

“We have a story telling morning. We have a yarnning session. Parents are welcome to bring their children to that and they do,” says Carole Medcalf, CEO of Brewarrina Business Centre. BBC is an Aboriginal co-operative responsible for setting up both centres in the remote NSW towns.

Carole says Ngunnhu, Waroos and Booris Place of Learning is providing children’s

and parents activities on an ongoing basis.

“We also run parenting programs for local people. We run them either individually because we’ve had a lot of young mums who are not too keen on participating in groups but they need the assistance.

“And then we are running parenting groups, where a whole group of usually young parents will go through a programmed schedule.”

### Community involvement

Carole is looking to promote community involvement in the centre: a place where residents — usually older members of the community who have raised families — can come and share their cultural knowledge and parental skills.

“There’s a contribution that they have in the community that they probably don’t recognise currently as being of too much value except to their own family, whereas for me I see it as being of value to the whole community,” she says.

“Tapping into that and sharing that with other people in the community and getting people to recognise the value of that is important.”

The Brewarrina centre also runs sessions in conjunction with other organisations.

For example, Carole says Far West NSW Medicare Local might run a workshop at the centre on the effects of domestic violence on children, with the centre providing child minding facilities on site

while the parents are attending.

The director of the Brewarrina pre-school, Frayne Barker, sees great potential for the children and family centre to bring services to Aboriginal families, rather than vice versa.

### Referral role

Carole Medcalf says the centre will also have an important referral role: “It’s a place where, I hope, if we can’t assist, we can at least direct people to a point where they can be assisted.

“And that we forge relationships with other organisations to the extent where, if we contact (they will be able) assist. So sometimes being advocates for support.”

Brewarrina (known locally as ‘Bre’) has a large Aboriginal population, with over 1000 Aboriginal residents according to the last census, including 325 children aged 14 or under.

The town was recently named as the most disadvantaged local government area in NSW.

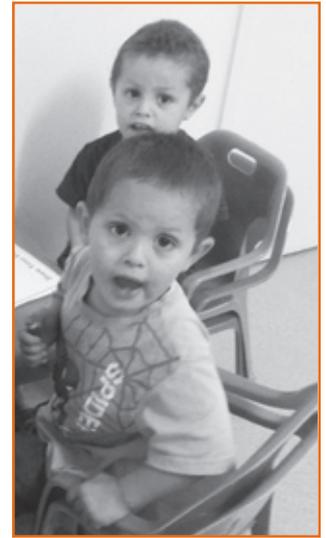
“There’s very little in the way of regular employment, so obviously social disadvantage that comes from unemployment is an issue,” says Carole.

“Remoteness is (also) an issue. It sounds funny saying remote communities in NSW. But, in my experience, the remoteness that Brewarrina and Lightning Ridge experience is probably as significant as



*Ngemba Dancers at the sod turning for Brewarrina children and family centre, 26 February 2013: (from left) Feli McHughes, Kaylan Murray and Ronald Simpson with Darryl Ferguson.*

Continued on next page



some of the more remote communities in Queensland and WA.

"The connection to regular services is minimal, which is why this service is really significant, I think. We have the capacity to work with and attract skills into the community that aren't currently available as well as skill up local people to deal with those issues.

"Issues like domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse... are very high in proportion to the population. But there are minimal services with those sorts of skills being offered to support the community.

"We have to try and bring those skills in."

To highlight the point, Carole says drug and alcohol services for Brewarrina residents are located 80kms outside the town; and a safe house in town has just closed, meaning clients now have to travel to Lightning Ridge (210 kms north-east of Brewarrina) to access family violence services until a new safe house is built.

"While the service that is being provided is doing its best in a difficult situation, for a town that has a very high indication of domestic violence, that's a fairly dramatic situation," Carole says.

### Centre at Lightning Ridge

The children and family centre at Lightning Ridge — Durralli Walandaa ('Come Grow Strong' in the local Kamilaroi language) — has the same staff resources as the Brewarrina centre and is also in temporary premises

When the permanent facility is finished in November 2013, it will be built on Aboriginal land, donated by the Lightning Ridge Aboriginal Land Council



following a successful native title claim.

Lightning Ridge has an Aboriginal population of approximately 490 — including 175 children who are 14 years old or under — facing similar issues to families at Brewarrina.

Neither the Lightning Ridge nor the Brewarrina centre provides direct child care services at present. Carole explains the Brewarrina Business Centre hasn't been funded for these, despite child care services being an essential requirement under the licence agreements.

The BBC is currently negotiating with the NSW Department of Human Services to have both centres in a position to provide child care services when they move into their permanent premises in late 2013.

On the future of Ngunnhu, Waroos and Booris Place of Learning, Carole says: "In the long run, it will be a child care centre, a long day care centre, and my vision for that — and I know the community's vision for that — is one where Aboriginal children understand about the Ngemba people who are here and learn about all the other tribal groups that exist in Brewarrina and their prominent place in the town."

Each centre has a local reference group, made up of service providers and

**PHOTOS:** Children at Brewarrina enjoy story time followed by playing with Play Doh: Jakiyah Pritchard, Taniqua Morris, Koesha Morris and twins Israel and Isaac Rose.

interested local community members, which has provided advice on designing the buildings, running the centres and issues in the community.

"Initially they made connections for us in the community — telling us the issues we should know about," Carole says.

"Now they are guiding us on how we promote local Aboriginal stories and identity in the centres. That's what their role is — to make sure we do that."

### The future

Carole is confident of the future of both centres amid uncertainty on the level of government funding beyond June 2014.

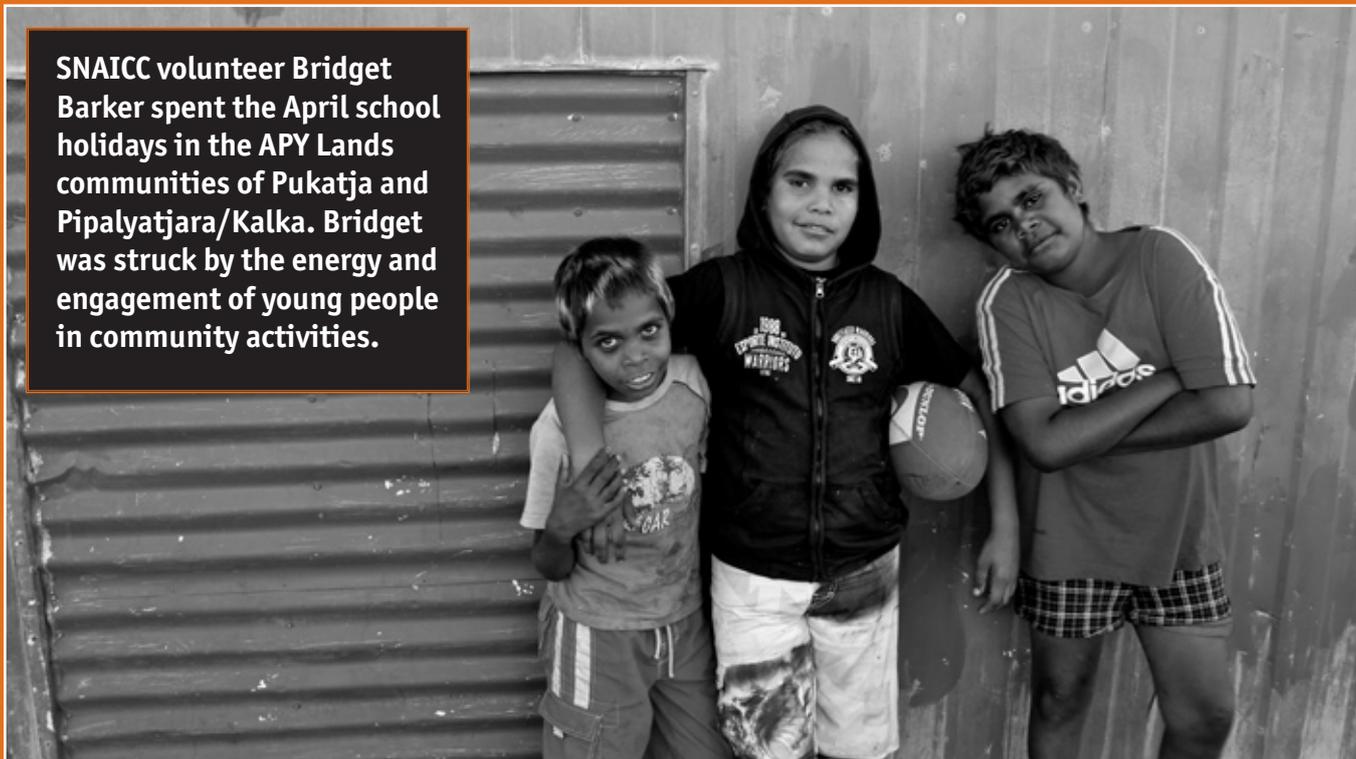
She says the key to sustainability in the long-term is a model "external" from government funding, but adds: "There will also be a requirement to receive some government funding."

A new Executive Director for both services has just started work with the organisation and the BBC is looking for alternative sources of income, with the long-term aim for the centres to be self-sufficient organisations.

But that is "nowhere near close to happening currently" according to Carole. "We've only received half of the funding that we were told we were going to get by this point," she explains.

Importantly, Carole says there's an acknowledgement in both local communities of the critical importance of the centres and "that it's not OK for Aboriginal families to lack support any longer."

**SNAICC volunteer Bridget Barker spent the April school holidays in the APY Lands communities of Pukatja and Pipalyatjara/Kalka. Bridget was struck by the energy and engagement of young people in community activities.**



## School holidays a busy time in APY Lands

For many years now the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council has run school holiday programs in South Australia's Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

The school holidays have been identified by community as a time that poses greater risk to the youth being involved in substance misuse and other risk-taking activities. In this sense the holiday activities function as a preventative and diversionary program that is fun, accessible and appropriate to all youth in community.

Media and academic reports of these Aboriginal communities often focus on the negative aspects of community life. Yet, I find that when spending even a short amount of time in these communities, the positives are much more evident. By way of example, all of the craft and sporting activities my work partner and I provided were utilised to the full capacity by the youth that attended our sessions.

In Pukatja, situated 425 kms south-west of Alice Springs, we had access to the school hall where trampoline and gym mats were available. Aside from the fearless flips and spins off the



trampoline onto mats, this equipment made for a perfect obstacle course. An entire afternoon was spent building and re-building and designing multiple obstacle courses and challenges that were ultimately a competition for the fastest participant and overall winner for the afternoon.

The youth in Pukatja were bursting for new ideas and activities and certainly keen to engage when given the opportunity. There hadn't been a disco in a while in Pukatja, so while the speakers and sound system we had were not the best or loudest, this didn't stop the dancing and excitement of a Friday night disco going off without a hitch.



*Main photo (from left): John, Ronnie and Nicholas chill out at Pukatja community. Above left: Derek displays his work in the t-shirt dyeing activity. Above: Shannon with a snack of maku (witchetty grub).*

Pipalyatjara and Kalka are neighbouring communities located in the very north-west corner of SA, some 780 kms from Alice Springs. They are where we spent our second week of the holidays. Besides the beautiful surrounds, people in the Pip and Kalka communities were also particularly welcoming.

It was the week before the first football match so all the fellas were training

Continued on next page

every second night. The nicest part about the training is that many community members, not just the older fellas, were there watching keenly.

There was also training for softball, with girls and women of all ages participating in sessions. Activities that we ran in Pip and Kalka included craft work, various sports and competitions, t-shirt tie-dyeing and a *kungka* (girls) bush trip to dig for *maku* (witchetty grubs) and *tjala* (honey ants) and pick *tjantu* (bush tomatoes).

Danielle Long, the local Anangu youth worker, facilitated our trip and brought her mum Emily to assist. Danielle does a fantastic job in Kalka — her levels of engagement with and respect for the youth is amazing.

The NPY School Holiday program is incredibly important for the youth and children in these communities and I hope to see it fully funded and functional for many years to come.

For more information on NPY Women's Council go to: [www.npywc.org.au](http://www.npywc.org.au)



*Above: Young Ina is pictured doing some craft work at Pukatja.*



*Above: Jennifer Dunn and daughter Camisha at Pukatja community.*



*Left: A young Adelaide visitor to the communities in a cheeky mood for the camera.*

*Below: Children play as dusk descends on Docker River community.*

*All photos in this article by Bridget Barker.*





**ABOVE:** Young Eribeta and Jules at Milikapiti pre-school. **RIGHT:** Loretta Cook and baby Coleen pictured at the Milikapiti store. **BELOW:** (from left) Cherie Mackley, Aleisha, Annalisa and Menzies community worker Michelle Woody.



The Tiwi Islands communities nestle in a glorious tropical setting off the coast of Darwin in the Arafura Sea. They are perhaps best known for their export to the mainland of gifted Australian Rules footballers with names like Long and Rioli.

But another success story is emerging. The 'Let's Start' Parent-Child program is also putting the score on the board.

"Let's Start came out of a program picked up by the Tiwi Health Board in 2000, which was designed to address the high levels of suicide on the islands," explains Associate Professor Gary Robinson, from the Centre for Child Development and Education (CCDE), at the Menzies School of Health Research.

"The program, which is for pre-school aged kids with behavioural problems, is specially adapted to meet the needs of Indigenous people. We have run the program since 2005 — in Darwin for four years — and continuously on the Tiwi Islands."

Michelle Woody, a past parent in the program and now Local Implementation Officer for Let's Start in the Tiwi Island community of Milikapiti is enthusiastic about the program. "It helps children and parents with changes in attitude, self esteem and anger," says Michelle. "I have seen lots of good changes in children, they listen more to their parents. They learn how to share. To care for each other and respect each other."

A detailed evaluation of the program conducted in 2009 attests to its effectiveness. This demonstration that the program produces high quality results saw Let's Start expanded to more communities in the Top End.

## A family affair on Tiwi Islands



Today a dedicated team from CCDE is working with young children and their parents, across the Tiwi Islands, and in four communities in the Victoria-Daly Rivers Shire, away to the south-west of Darwin.

Let's Start seeks to build the confidence of parents, and to help them nurture stronger relationships with their children. For their part, children learn about rules and co-operation. They are encouraged to recognise their own feelings and to think about the feelings of others.

"It's about trying to support the kids' development and make them feel comfortable at school. We want to

see improvements in kids' behaviour, confidence, and general social-emotional skills — in the classroom as well as at home," explains Professor Robinson.

"We also want parents to feel more confident, and improve their responsiveness to the child, so that the stress and anxiety of parenting is reduced."

He says transition to school can be a difficult time for a young child. "Kids can be shy or anxious, and reluctant to leave home to go to school, but this innovative program helps to bridge the gap "Let's

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**Let's Start seeks to build the confidence of parents, and to help them nurture stronger relationships with their children. For their part, children learn about rules and co-operation.**

Start is like a quiet kind of schoolroom with your parent there."

The program is built around 10 weekly two-hour sessions over a school term. Between five and eight children participate in each group program, with one of each child's parents present for the sessions. The programs are delivered by team-leaders from CCDE, in collaboration with trained local people who supply the critically important cultural expertise.

Parents can self-refer to the program but a lot of referrals come from schools and from childcare centres, health centres, and other key agencies in the community. The Let's Start team invests time and effort in forging links with these organisations and with families.

Importantly, Let's Start is fun. The program uses play and expressive activities that involve both parents and children.

"We play a series of games with themes around getting to know each other, and of doing tasks with the parent

like making play dough or doing a big drawing," says Robinson. We use an exercise called *Stop Think Do* which teaches kids the idea of thinking before they leap."

This is an occasion for learning — not for shame or guilt. Successes are reinforced and strategies to overcome the frustrations are discussed. "It's a good opportunity for parents to have the kind of reflective, supportive conversation that they may miss in the hurly-burly of home life."

Let's Start is enjoying great support amongst the local people. "We get lots of spontaneous feedback from teachers about improvements in kids' behaviour," says Robinson.

"We also see parents who become very strong advocates for the program, who talk about the things they learned and the things that they felt safe to say that they hadn't been able to say before. We've had parents who have enrolled themselves for three separate courses with three different children."

The CCDE staff who deliver the program speak of the satisfaction they get from seeing the confidence of the parents increase through the ten week course. "Sometimes parents may feel embarrassed and shy when reflecting on their children's needs and experience" says Let's Start Project Officer Cherie Mackley, "But, by the end of the program we see them willing to share and learn from each other about the challenges of parenting and the needs of their children".



*ABOVE: Milikapiti primary school students Aleisha and Joyce. (Photos in this article are courtesy of Kara Burns.)*



The Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) is an independent medical and research institute, a national leader in health, education and research training.

Menzies has made a difference in people's lives for more than a quarter of a century.

Specialising in Indigenous and tropical health research, the team at Menzies carry out research in more than 60 Indigenous communities across Australia and in developing countries in our region.

We continue to find new ways of breaking the cycle of disease and improving the health and wellbeing of Australian society and beyond.

Menzies was established in 1985 as a body corporate of the Northern Territory Government under the Menzies School of Health Research Act 1985.

This Act was amended in 2004 to formalise Menzies' relationship with Charles Darwin University (CDU). Menzies is now a school within CDU's Institute of Advanced Studies.

For more information on Menzies, visit: [www.menzies.edu.au](http://www.menzies.edu.au)

The Let's Start Parent-Child Program is another impressive example of Menzies researchers helping to create a brighter future for Indigenous families and children. Associate Professor Robinson and his team look forward to taking this ground-breaking program to an even larger number of families in the future.

For more information about Let's Start visit <http://ccde.menzies.edu.au/our-projects/lets-start>



5th SNAICC National Conference

## For Our Children: Living and Learning Together

4 - 6 June 2013, Cairns

# Former NZ Children's Commissioner to speak at conference

**Professor Cindy Kiro — New Zealand's first female and only Maori to have held the post of Children's Commissioner — will be among the international guests at SNAICC's 5th National Conference.**

Professor Kiro, who was national Children's Commissioner from 2003 to 2009, will be a keynote speaker at the conference. She will also participate at a forum on Indigenous youth rights dealing with strategies for improving child protection outcomes.

"What I'll be talking about is the need for more integrated health and social services as a step towards strengthening the protection of children's rights," Professor Kiro told *SNAICC News*.

"I will also be looking at the links between welfare, education, justice and housing, and how these must be addressed if we are serious about improving child protection outcomes."

Professor Kiro says that disadvantaged Maori and Pacific Islander children will suffer in the future if the New Zealand government does not invest in their wellbeing now.

Professor Kiro is currently Head of the Faculty of Education at Victoria University in New Zealand.

During her five-year tenure as Children's Commissioner, and in over 20 years working with community organisations, Professor Kiro has seen firsthand the major issues facing Maori and Pacific Islander children.



*Professor Cindy Kiro*

"In New Zealand, child poverty is a huge problem and unfortunately, Maori and Pasifika children suffer disproportionately from poverty and its effects," Professor Kiro said.

"What we're seeing now is a clustering of effects, where major social determinants contributing to their poorer health and educational outcomes are not being properly addressed."

Professor Kiro claims that major health issues affecting New Zealand's Indigenous population all have a social cause.

"We're seeing lots of Maori children suffering disproportionately from respiratory illnesses. It's been found that, in a lot of those cases, overcrowded living conditions were a significant contributing factor."

In addition, a recent UNICEF report, *Child Well-being in Rich Countries* shows that up to a third of all households in New Zealand are affected by mould.

Professor Kiro asserts that services targeting Indigenous poverty must be culturally attuned in order to be effective.

"Crowded housing is such a huge issue because governments aren't discerning the fact that it's part of Maori and Pasifika culture for people to live with their extended family," she says.

"What this means is that where there is poverty, unfortunately it is often a multi-generational poverty."

As well as a lack of cultural appropriateness, Professor Kiro says that the UNICEF report highlighted the lack of adequate policy support for Maori children and their families, especially where their families are economically or socially disadvantaged.

"The biggest problem facing disadvantaged Maori and Pasifika children right now is a lack of adequate resources being committed by the government to crucial services and programs," says Professor Kiro.

"Governments need to show leadership and foresight by investing in children now, and by having services focused on early intervention. If there is a failure to invest now, services won't be as preventative as they should be.

"The future of these children will be seriously undermined and that will just hurt the country in the long run."

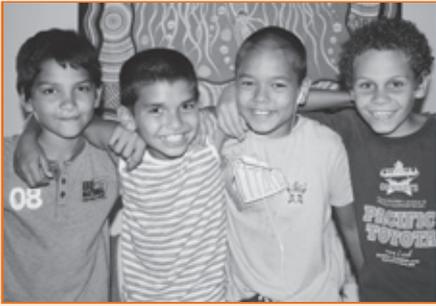
Professor Kiro emphasised the need for integrated services for working with Indigenous communities because of the failure of 'siloes' services to provide adequately "especially if these are treated as marginal such as with Maori Affairs or Aboriginal Affairs rather than responsibilities by mainstream services to provide appropriately and adequately for these children and their families".

"The danger is the ongoing marginalisation and under-resourcing of services for children who actually need far more," she said.

Professor Kiro believes Indigenous disadvantage in New Zealand is best addressed through a rights-based approach.

"Certainly these gross injustices for Maori and Pasifika children in health and developmental outcomes are moral failures. We should aim for a rights-based approach so that governments can be held accountable," she says.

"Above all, we need to keep our eye on equity. If we are serious about remedying these issues, then we must prove it through an honest commitment to equity."



## Learning-at-work program aims to boost early childhood workforce

**The SNAICC National Conference will feature a session on an innovative early childhood training program being run in the Northern Territory.**

The session will be led by Millie Olcay, a Senior Lecturer at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), together with Kate Race of the Department of Education and Children's Services, Liz Banney (early childhood trainer/educator at Yuendumu) and Yuendumu students (names to be confirmed).

In 2011, BIITE received funding from the NT Department of Education to deliver an Integrated Family Services initiative. The Building the Remote Early Childhood Workforce pilot project supports remote NT communities through agreed plans to develop Aboriginal children and family centres, under the Indigenous Early Childhood Development 'National Partnership Agreement'.

The workforce pilot aims to deliver appropriate and locally-customised early childhood training to employees who work in community and children's services, as well as senior school students, to help develop a strong, skilled, integrated and sustainable early childhood workforce.

To ensure this outcome, Batchelor will use a remote delivery model of on-site training which involves a trainer living in community. Millie says this will enhance the learning experience and participation of employees.

"The idea is to help build capacity in the early childhood workforce with a view to those students having the opportunity to move into a role in early childhood spaces, particularly in the new child and family centres that are being built this year," Millie says.

"The uniqueness of this model is that the trainer does live in community and that

allows for a depth of relationship that doesn't always exist with fly-in fly-out training. So it provides them with an opportunity to engage with the trainer when and where they can."

Millie says two students from the Central Desert community of Yuendumu will share their experiences at the conference.

"Conference delegates will be given an opportunity to hear from the students themselves around a particular model of remote delivery of training in community and children's services in Yuendumu. So it's really about hearing from the students' perspectives what this training model has afforded for them," Millie says.

Student and trainer-educator perspectives will be shared about the Certificate I, II and III clustered 'Learning at Work



**The Tuesday evening session of the SNAICC conference will feature a dinner and film night at the coastal community of Yarrabah.**

Located a short drive from Cairns, Yarrabah is home to over 3000 residents. Guests will be welcomed and entertained by the local community with a dinner of local seafood and bush tucker under the stars.

After dinner, an outdoor screening of films made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from all over the country will take place.

The film program follows on from the success of the last SNAICC

Approach' delivered to students, including creche workers, playgroup leaders and assistant teachers working in the early years of primary school.

Presenters will also discuss the BIITE 'both ways learning' philosophy of education whereby a common set of core skills is developed that privilege local Indigenous views, knowledge and culture as well as Western theories and philosophies on early childhood development, family engagement and collaborative practice.

"Under Batchelor's learning-at-work approach, the trainer works very hard with the community members to privilege their Indigenous knowledge...Indigenous child rearing practices, for example, are being recognised, celebrated and honoured," says Millie.

"The idea is that both Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge is coming together in a space where we can learn from and with each other."

conference's screenings at Larapinta Learning Centre in Alice Springs where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people told joyous, serious, intimate and exciting stories through the medium of motion picture and screen.

Over 10 short films to be screened, including a music clip and short film made by the Yarrabah State School. The program also features 'We Made These Films', a collection from Big hART's Yijala Yala Project in Ieramugadu (Roebourne, WA) and Ngapartji Ngapartji shorts (NT), and a new set from Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre Stories (Alice Springs). *Connecting to Sea Country* — VACCA digital story project (Victoria) and a short film from Maningrida (NT) will also screen.

Some of these films and longer films will also play throughout the conference in the foyer.

# New toolkit to strengthen Indigenous governance



**“The new toolkit is a way to share the innovation, success, wisdom and resilience that we consistently see from Indigenous organisations across the country as part of the Indigenous Governance Awards.”**

**— Leah Armstrong  
CEO  
Reconciliation  
Australia**

**Practical governance information and resources are now at the fingertips of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across Australia thanks to a new online Indigenous Governance Toolkit.**

Reconciliation Australia recently launched the free Indigenous Governance Toolkit following the success of the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards.

The toolkit is designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities looking for information to strengthen their governance.

Developed as part of Reconciliation Australia’s partnership with BHP Billiton, it includes comprehensive advice, tools, templates and audio-visual resources that can be downloaded and customised to local circumstances.

The Indigenous Governance Toolkit draws on evidence from the Indigenous Community Governance Project in Australia and the latest international research from the United States and Canada.

Most importantly the toolkit pairs this research with practical examples of outstanding governance from the Indigenous Governance Awards program since 2005. The case studies, insights and tips in the toolkit come straight from the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander Australians working on the ground with their own communities and organisations.

## **Sharing knowledge**

Reconciliation Australia CEO Leah Armstrong said the new toolkit is about sharing knowledge and innovation.

“The new toolkit is a way to share the innovation, success, wisdom and resilience that we consistently see from Indigenous organisations across the country as part of the Indigenous Governance Awards,” Ms Armstrong said.

“The finalists of the 2012 Indigenous Governance Awards demonstrate just how successfully the best Indigenous organisations are at sustaining governance models that are effective, meaningful and legitimate in both worlds. The toolkit is about sharing this knowledge so that we can help breed success and see it replicated across the nation.”

SNAICC was one of eight finalists recognised for its outstanding governance as part of the Indigenous Governance Awards in 2012.

SNAICC won the Highly Commended Award in Category A, which was “for outstanding examples of Indigenous governance in Indigenous incorporated organisations”.

The main award in the category was won by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council Aboriginal Corporation (NPY Women’s Council) in Alice Springs.

Examples and advice from the 2012 finalists and other shortlisted award applicants, such as Yappera Children’s Services, are showcased throughout the toolkit.

“Reconciliation Australia encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to use and adapt the toolkit to their needs,” Ms Armstrong said.

“We are confident it will become an invaluable resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people determined to exercise control over their own futures and create shared prosperity across the nation.”

The toolkit can be found at [www.reconciliation.org.au/governance](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/governance)

For more information on the kit or governance issues, contact Phoebe Dent at Reconciliation Australia on (02) 6272 2618.

At the SNAICC conference in June, SNAICC manager Sue Beecher and Emily Cheesman will run a ‘yarning circle’ to discuss how philanthropy and fundraising could help raise money and support organisations. For more information, contact Sue on (03) 9489 8099.

Well, it has certainly been a very busy time for the SNAICC training team, that consists of, well...me really! (and our deadly consultants, Lenora, Veronica and Terri-Anne). Since January I have been super busy continuing to deliver the 'Through Young Black Eyes' (TYBE) train-the-trainer workshops — generously funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation — across the country.

January saw Veronica and I at Port Stephens Family Support in Raymond Terrace, NSW where we were very excited to see such a wonderful representation of strong, young Aboriginal men attend the training. You can hear from Nathan and Brad about their thoughts on the workshop on YouTube ([. This workshop](#)). This workshop also saw the introduction of 'Cletus the Foetus' who proved to be extremely well behaved and an excellent addition.

Following this workshop, I headed off to Caboolture, Qld, to meet with Terri-Anne to deliver a workshop at Bargumar Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation. Rolling out these workshops has taught me that things never go exactly to plan, however with a little innovative thinking, we can still get by. So when our IT equipment failed in Caboolture, the quick-thinking Ivan very generously (and perhaps naively) offered to hold the laptop so that the group could watch a short film. In hindsight, we probably should have told Ivan that the film went for 20 minutes! Thanks again Ivan...you're too deadly!

After this, Veronica and I headed off to Victoria to train the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation. Despite the 30+ degree temperatures, we thoroughly enjoyed our time in Mildura, including a beautiful rendition of 'My Island Home' performed by Billie during the workshop.

### Surviving 'luxury' accommodation

After Mildura, Veronica and I ventured off to Njernda Aboriginal Corporation at Echuca. Veronica and I were feeling pretty chuffed with ourselves when we checked out our 'luxury' accommodation — so pleased that we spent the morning bragging about it to our participants during the workshop. However, we were soon stopped in our tracks when the locals kindly informed us that our luxury accommodation was in fact the old



Bec Boss

# Travelling Trainer Tales

funeral parlour! Needless to say, we were not so excited to have to return there for another night!

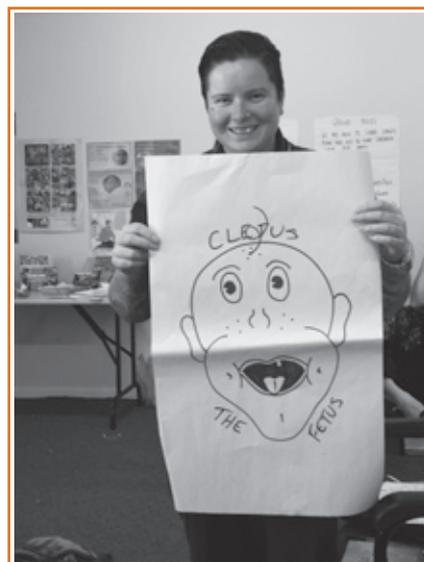
We survived our night in the morgue, and thought what better place to 'chill out' than Alice Springs? Terri-Anne and I headed up to Tangentyere Council in March to deliver their workshop. I was completely in awe of the beautiful country that I was so privileged to set foot on during this trip.

After visiting Alice Springs, I actually got to spend a few weeks in Melbourne, much to the delight of my four-legged friend, Mia. But unfortunately for Mia, this was short-lived, as I jet-setted off to Geraldton, WA with Lenora at the beginning of April, to deliver training for the Aboriginal Family Legal Service. I was completely overwhelmed by the hospitality of the locals, in particular, Dianne who went above and beyond to ensure that our trip to Geraldton was comfortable and enjoyable. Dianne even brought her fan in from home to ensure that this Melbourne girl didn't overheat whilst delivering the training in the tin shed in the middle of the bush, with no air conditioning and 35 degree temperatures outside.

### Special thanks

I also want to extend a special thank you to Dianne and her daughters for their efforts on my behalf when my wallet was stolen during this trip. I am extremely grateful for their assistance during this stressful time, and especially for offering to send down the mob to Geraldton airport, if I wasn't allowed to board the plane home because of lack of identification.

Thankfully, I was allowed to board, and soon found myself on yet another plane, this time to Cairns. Lenora and I spent two wonderful days training the mob at Apunipima Cape York Aboriginal Health



Nic Thompson and her creation, Cletus the Foetus.

Service. Again, we were overwhelmed with the number of strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men that we had at this training. This industry is heavily dominated by women, and it is inspiring to see so many men standing up and supporting other men in their communities.

Our next destinations are Brewarrina, NSW, and Port Adelaide, SA to deliver the final two workshops under this grant. We anticipate that by the time we have finished this project, we will have trained approximately 160 people across the country on how to use the 'TYBE' kit! This is absolutely amazing, and I wish to acknowledge everyone who has attended a workshop to date for all of their hard work, dedication and commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We need to continue this valuable work.

SNAICC is also proud to announce the release of the latest version of the 'Through Young Black Eyes' train-the-trainer kit (see page 24).

Until next time...stay deadly!!



## Poster on out-of-home care standards

**SNAICC has released a new poster that aims to 'interpret' the National Standards for out-of-home care as they relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care.**

The National Standards for out-of-home care are an initiative of the Australian Government and state-territory governments – and one of 12 priority projects under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–20*.

In developing a new poster, SNAICC seeks to interpret the 13 standards into a more culturally-appropriate and meaningful explanation for professionals who are working with our young ones in care. In other words, what does each standard mean for our young ones?

The interpretations of the standards will assist in helping to apply the quality and standard of care that is expected for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care.

Governments, in conjunction with the non-government sector, have developed the national standards to drive improvements and ensure children

in need of out-of-home care are given consistent, best practice care, no matter where they live.

The 13 standards aim to achieve this by focusing on the key areas within care that directly influence positive outcomes. These are:

- health
- education
- care planning
- connection to family
- culture and community
- transition from care
- training and support for carers
- belonging and identity, and
- safety, stability and security.

Many children in out-of-home care can be safely reunited with their families when their families receive appropriate supports and interventions and some children may be in out-of-home care for a relatively short period. Others may need to be in out-of-home care for the longer term to make sure they are safe and well and to help them overcome the effects of trauma, abuse and neglect.

Evidence shows that the experiences and

quality of care received in out-of-home care can be critical to determining whether a child or young person can recover from the effects of trauma and are more able to access opportunities in life.

Cultural identity and connection to family, community and country are the birth right of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and what they need to prosper. All our children, wherever they live, should enjoy a childhood that encourages them to aim high and explore all of life's opportunities. They should be encouraged to dream like other kids of a happy and prosperous life and be supported to realise their dreams.

SNAICC's new A3-sized poster will be distributed to out-of-home care services nationally, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies.

The poster is available online or for purchase in hard copy. For more information, please contact Joanne Borg, SNAICC Resource Officer, on (03) 9489 8099 and email, [joanne.borg@snaicc.org.au](mailto:joanne.borg@snaicc.org.au)

# New resource aims to promote awareness on culture and cultural needs



SNAICC project officer Jo Borg holds the new flip chart.

SNAICC has published a flip chart to assist in 'unpacking' what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mean when they refer to culture and cultural needs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Cultural Needs resource portrays different aspects of cultural connections that enhance a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's sense of identity and wellbeing.

It also acknowledges the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Development of the flip chart evolved from a research report into assessment tools that measured the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Not one size fits all VACCA, La Trobe, Take Two, 2008, unpublished), and the subsequent development of a cultural needs diagram.

The diagram (explained in the flip chart) was developed with consideration that some children may not be already

culturally connected — for example, those in the child protection system not placed within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The diagram may also be useful for working with children who are well immersed in their culture as it may inform those who work with children and therefore support them to work in a more culturally-appropriate way — for example, those involved in early childhood education and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Each element of the flip chart provides space for writing about reflective practice, to fill in thoughts and ideas. There are some suggestions, questions and ideas to assist when reflecting on practice and how to support each individual child.

The flip chart also includes a list of useful resources to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and issues.

The new resource is intended for use by professionals involved in early childhood education and care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

It will assist these groups to better understand some of the specific cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and to improve their practice by integrating these cultural needs.

Hard copies of the flip chart can be ordered online or downloaded from the SNAICC website: [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

For further information on the resource, contact SNAICC project officer Jo Borg on (03) 9489 8099 or [joanne.borg@snaicc.org.au](mailto:joanne.borg@snaicc.org.au)

The flip chart project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.



SNAICC News is the quarterly newsletter of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc.

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relevant organisations for current information concerning their activities.

Line art by Ikanbala (Richard McLean).

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# THROUGH YOUNG BLACK EYES

SNAICC has produced an updated edition of its acclaimed *Through Young Black Eyes* workshop kit on family violence and child abuse and neglect.

The kit provides practical information — in hard copy and on CD — to help run workshops, share stories and take local actions to help keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children safe and happy.

The latest edition of the kit — first published in 2002 — was launched by SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams at Families Australia's Child Aware Approaches Conference in Melbourne on 11 April.

Ms Williams said it was important that SNAICC contributed in a practical way to tackling the serious issue of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"The kit is based on the principle that — as much as governments are important — communities and individuals must be empowered to wage the battle against family violence and child abuse and neglect at the local level," Ms Williams said.

"The kit contains a wealth of excellent and up-to-date information for organisations to work towards making communities safe for our children and families."



Major components of this updated kit are:

- a *Workshop Facilitators Guide* to enable community members to plan, prepare, manage and run workshops on family violence and child abuse
- a handbook that includes important contact details for services, and information on state and territory legislation relating to family violence and child abuse and neglect
- a *Community Leaders Guide*, with suggestions and ideas to help community leaders protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from family violence and abuse, and
- a pamphlet for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children about family violence and child abuse.

The newest edition of the kit contains up-to-date contact details for emergency services and other relevant support agencies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children and families.

As in previous editions, the kits also includes valuable resources produced by other organisations to help deal with family violence and child abuse and neglect.

One such resource is a 20-minute film titled *Who Feels the Children's Pain*, about children witnessing

family violence. The film was made by the Cape York RAATSIC Advisory Association and David Farmer.

Ms Williams thanked all the contributors — within and outside SNAICC — who provided the research, advice, text and photos to this and previous editions of the *Through Young Black Eyes* kit.

The 2013 edition was funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

"On behalf of SNAICC, I would like to thank FaHCSIA for funding this important project," Ms Williams said.

The kit is available for purchase from SNAICC by calling (03) 9489 8099.

SNAICC will continue to provide training on the new kit on a fee-based service. For more information on workshops, please contact Rebecca Boss in the SNAICC office on the number above.