



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be allowed to count on child protection**

To mark 2013 National Child Protection Week, SNAICC has launched two major reports that reinforce the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection.

The reports provide further evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in all stages of the child protection process is central to improve decision-making and to reduce the spiralling over-representation of Indigenous children in out-of-home care.

The first report, titled *Whose Voice Counts?*, looks at whether current legislation, policies and systems are empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about the care and protection of their children.

The 1997 *Bringing them Home* report highlighted the tragic consequences of excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives from decisions that created the Stolen Generations. Sixteen years later, this report questions how far we have come to ensure those voices are never again left out.

“Significant questions remain...as to whether we have taken enough action to ensure that history does not repeat and redress the ongoing impacts of past policies,” the report finds.

The research identifies reforms needed to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities count when decisions are made for their kids. It proposes stronger models of cultural advice and support, as well as delegation and transfer of decision-making authority as potential solutions.

The second SNAICC report, produced with the NSW peak body AbSec, profiles a groundbreaking new approach to developing the capacity of Aboriginal out-of-home care agencies in NSW through partnerships with mainstream organisations.

Government and the NGO sector in NSW have agreed that all out-of-home care placements for Aboriginal children will be transitioned to being supported by Aboriginal agencies.

**SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander children**

The transfer will ensure that services meet the needs of Aboriginal children and build on the strengths of Aboriginal communities.

The new report — titled *Developing Capacity Through Partnerships* — details the five-phase partnership development process that is preparing Aboriginal communities across New South Wales to take on all placements, and the critical role being played by AbSec to facilitate partnerships.

SNAICC Chairperson Sharron Williams said the new SNAICC reports delivered some timely messages in Child Protection Week, and inspiration and guidance for states and territories on some complex issues.

“The theme for Child Protection Week is that child protection is everybody’s business. Child protection is not the exclusive domain of governments. Individuals, families and community leaders all have a role to play in the protection and wellbeing of our children,” Ms Williams said.

“But the *Whose Voice Counts* report highlights that while policies, legislation and systems have for decades given in-principle support to our participation, the reality is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are still being marginalised when it comes to making decisions in relation to the protection of children.

“This exclusion has contributed to a dramatic and unacceptable rise in the number of our children in out-of-home care since the Stolen Generations report — from 2,785 in 1997 to over 13,200 today.”

Ms Williams said the new SNAICC resource on out-of-home care services in NSW came at a critical time when governments and NGOs across the country were responding to recent inquiries and reports highlighting the need to increase capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.

“The report provides practical guidance and inspiration that could inform implementation of partnership capacity-building models in other jurisdictions and sectors,” she said.

“Governments must show more faith and build the capacity of our community organisations — as the NSW Government has done in partnership with AbSec — to participate in a more meaningful way in child protection and in supporting vulnerable children and families.

For more information on the new reports, go to [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au)

**Media inquiries:**      **Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, on (0432) 345 652**  
                                 **Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO, (0415) 188990**  
                                 **Giuseppe Stramandinoli, SNAICC Media Officer,**  
                                 **(0419) 508 125**