



# FAMILY MATTERS

- KIDS SAFE IN CULTURE, NOT IN CARE

An invitation to change the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children



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Since the 1997 enquiry into the Stolen Generations, child removal has increased by 400 per cent.

Removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families is a deeply traumatic experience, for the child, the family and their extended community. Childhood trauma has the potential to interrupt the normal physical, emotional and mental development of a child and can cause immeasurable social and psychological damage which is then carried into adult life.

Prolonged exposure to chronic stress and trauma impairs a child's ability to regulate behaviour. Without these skills, many children will develop self-destructive behaviours including aggression, violence and substance abuse in later life.

Compounding this issue is that the placement of Indigenous children into institutional care has meant many members of the Stolen Generations have lacked parenting role models. The lack of parenting role models has resulted at times in poor parenting skills, which were then passed onto their children. So the cycle continues, increasing the risk of contact with child protection systems and contributing to higher and higher rates of child removal.

Today Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are ten times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children. Since the 1997 enquiry into the Stolen Generations, child removal has increased by 400 per cent.

This project focuses only on a sector of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and acknowledges the thousands of Indigenous children growing up strong, and proud with their culture, their families and their communities.



# INVITATION TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE



We are going to halve the number of children across Australia in out-of-home care by 2018.

You can change the lives of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and make an immeasurable difference, contributing to better life outcomes and creating positive opportunities for their future.

Connection to culture is related to improved mental and emotional well-being and socio-economic outcomes. It is well researched that a strong cultural identity is a protective factor, contributing to a child's resilience. So we need to keep children safe within their own Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

*Family Matters – Kids safe in culture, not in care* aims to break the cycle of child removal.

This work will be carried out with the combined support of individuals, non-government organisations and philanthropic partners.

There are many ways you can be involved in this project. For example you may like to provide financial support through:

- Personal Donations (anything more than \$5.00 is tax deductible)
- Workplace Giving
- Gifts in Wills
- Organisational Sponsorship
- Philanthropic Funding

Or you may like to personally advocate for change in your community by talking to the media, schools, universities, meeting with your local member of parliament or emailing a politician.

To find out more about breaking the tragic cycle of child removal visit [www.familymatters.org.au](http://www.familymatters.org.au) or telephone Family Matters Manager, Gemma Unwin on (03) 9489 8099 or Philanthropy Manager, Sue Beecher 0408 950 923.



# OUR VISION



“We need to recognise and build on the strengths of Indigenous families and communities to support and nurture their children” SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safely at home, get a good education, are healthy and proud of who they are.

#### Key performance indicators

- To halve the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families and culture by 2018
- To close the gap by 2023 in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from families and culture

#### We will achieve this by:

Increasing non-Indigenous knowledge, understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, including their protective role to prevent child abuse and neglect

Promoting understanding of the links between trauma, social and economic disadvantage and child abuse and neglect

Increasing investment in prevention and early intervention services in absolute terms and as a proportion of total expenditure on child protection

Ensuring that the level of expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is in accordance with their need and over representation in the child protection system

Enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to exercise responsibilities for the safety and well being of their children and young people

Increasing compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

#### EVALUATION

A rigorous evaluation methodology will be developed and implemented using data analysis, surveys, participant evaluations and feedback on the website. The evaluation will measure the reduction in children being placed in out-of-home care, the quality of the initiative and changes in perception among members of the public.



## THE EXTENT OF THE ISSUE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise 5% of the nation's child population (0 – 17 years) yet represent a staggering 34% of all children in out-of-home care.

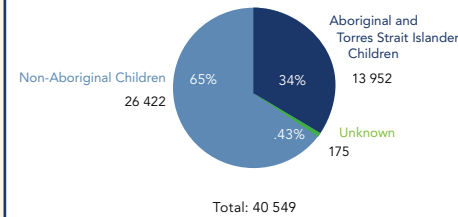
In the non-Aboriginal population, children are more likely to go into care because of emotional and physical abuse, however Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed mainly because of neglect. Neglect is extraordinarily hard to define but is strongly associated with disadvantage and poverty.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience significant social and economic disadvantage. They experience appallingly high rates of unemployment, incarceration and homelessness.

They have the highest mortality rate, lowest education attainment and lowest standards of health than anyone else in Australia. Many Aboriginal people live in communities in overcrowded housing, with no running water or sanitation and with little access to services and community support that we take for granted.

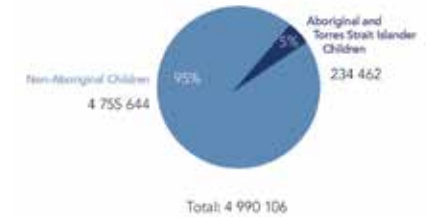
The early years of a child's life are a critical predictor to outcomes in later life. Understanding and addressing the underlying causes of the issues that lead to children being at risk of out-of-home placement is essential if sustainable change is to occur to the socio-economic position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.

Proportion of Children in Out-of-Home Care in Australia 2013



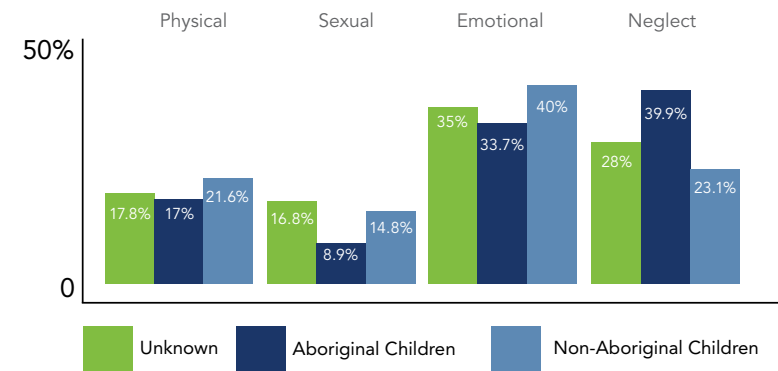
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection 2012 -2013

Population of Children Aged 0 – 17 years



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011

Children aged 0-17 years who were Subject of a Substantiated Notification of Abuse in Australia 2013



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection 2012-2013



...The early years of a child's life are a critical predictor to outcomes in later life.



“From where I come from in a remote community, it is really hurting. We have social workers coming to the community. They don't have respect for our people; they don't spend one or two weeks to talk to the family. They think they just know. They drag the cops around with them to the houses in our community, it is really sad ”

Family Matters Darwin Forum Participant.

## CHANGE IN DIRECTION

Intensive, early intervention, family support services work with families to improve family functioning skills and relationships in order to prevent a child's imminent removal or reunify the family when the child has been placed in out-of-home care.

Yet government invests only a small amount of money in family support compared to child protection and out-of-home care.

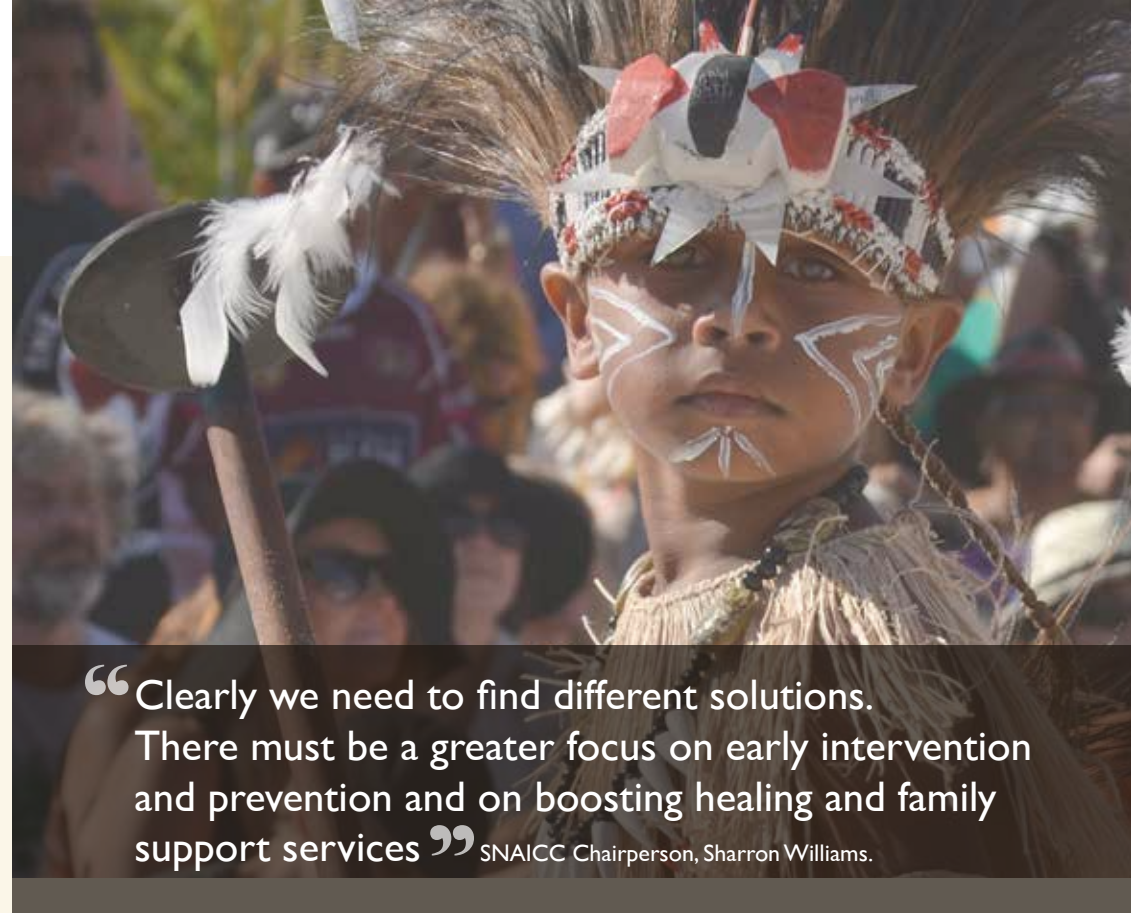
The cost effectiveness of prevention and early intervention services is well established. *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business, the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020* explicitly recognises the significance of prevention and early intervention.

Research is supportive of this approach, suggesting for example that culturally appropriate and intensive family support services have a high impact, reducing the need for child protection intervention and improving the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. So the protection of children becomes not merely a response to abuse and neglect, it is the promotion of safety and well being of children, which in turn strengthens families and the communities in which they live.

Despite the potential for long term cost savings in other areas such as education, health and the judicial system, governments continue to spend a disproportionate amount on child protection and the removal of children from their families.

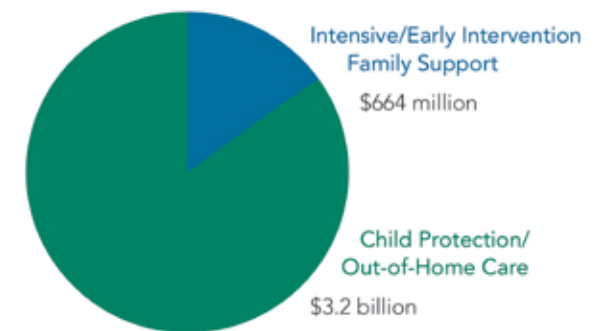
In Australia in 2013 \$3.2 billion was spent on child protection and out-of-home care compared to just \$664 million expenditure on intensive family support services.

Clearly a greater investment in prevention will significantly reduce the amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being placed in out-of-home care and create significant long term cost savings for government.



“Clearly we need to find different solutions. There must be a greater focus on early intervention and prevention and on boosting healing and family support services” SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams.

Comparison of Government Expenditure on Child Protection/ Out-of-Home Care and Intensive/Early Intervention Family Support 2013



Source: Review of Government Services 2014



# HOW IT CAME ABOUT



“ We need to stop and make them listen to what we are saying on the ground. So the next generation does not have to live through this again ”

Family Matters Darwin Forum Participant.

Over 1100 early childhood practitioners, non-government organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have participated in discussions regarding this over-representation.

These discussions have contributed to the development of a national strategic framework, establishment of a National Coordinating Group and the identification of priorities for this project.

*Family Matters - Kids safe in culture, not in care* is working in partnership with the non-government sector (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal organisations) using community engagement, capacity building, and communication strategies to reduce this over-representation.

Family Matters is a multilayered strategy with state based and national initiatives targeting government and non-government sectors. At the core of this initiative is a bottom up approach where consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, service providers and practitioners inform the content and strategic directions of this project.

At the peak of this initiative is a marketing campaign to educate the general public about Aboriginal parenting and the importance of keeping children safe in their culture, with their families and in their communities.

A groundswell of community interest and support for this issue will influence the government on a state and federal level to change its policies in relation to child protection and refocus its priorities on prevention and family support services.



# POWERFUL COLLABORATION



SNAICC is one of the longest standing peak Aboriginal organisations in Australia ... established in 1981.

*Family Matters – Kids safe in culture, not in care* is being led by the Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and driven by a National Coordinating Group.

## SNAICC

SNAICC is one of the longest standing peak Aboriginal organisations in Australia. Established in 1981 SNAICC provides invaluable support services, resources and training to Aboriginal non-government organisations involved in early childhood development and child protection. SNAICC also fosters partnerships, undertakes joint projects and provides policy and research advice to the government and non-government sectors.

SNAICC has a strong representational base with over 3 500 subscribers across Australia. Its management structure comprises chief executive officers from Aboriginal controlled organisations delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

SNAICC's governance policies and structure are impeccable. The organisation won the BHP Billiton and Reconciliation Australia's 2012 Indigenous Governance Award and also attained deductibility gift recipient status in the same year.

## National Coordinating Group

The National Coordinating Group driving Family Matters comprises chief executive officers or chairs from peak Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations:

- Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
- Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)
- Families Australia
- SNAICC

In addition, the Family Matters' Strategic Alliance encompasses almost 50 major non-government organisations and peak agencies nationwide who are supporting this strategy.



# WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?



“It is a totally unacceptable situation, far too many of our children are being separated from their family at a great human cost to those children and families”

SNAICC Chairperson, Sharron Williams.

Family Matters has a four year plan to halve the number of children across Australia in out-of-home care by 2018. Early childhood development and child protection legislation, policy and practices vary across Australia. In order to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care a state/territory based approach needs to be adopted.

In the next two years Family Matters will rollout public awareness campaigns and high profile public forums in every state and territory.

Over 2000 people will attend the forums nationwide and will discuss local issues in relation to over-representation and identify solutions for the community, the non-government sector and for government. State based action plans will be developed and government lobbied for their implementation.

The public awareness campaign will educate the community about the severity of the problem, highlight extensive research findings on the impact of child removal on mental and emotional well-being and encourage Australians to become public advocates.

The overall aim is to create a groundswell of public opinion and support for a change in government policy direction.





[www.familymatters.org.au](http://www.familymatters.org.au)

## **STATISTICAL SOURCES**

Review of Government Services 2014

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2012-2013

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 1997-1998

## **ALTERNATIVE FORMATS**

This document is available on request in alternative formats for example large type, braille or audio file.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

SNAICC recognises the enormous work and contribution by people across Australia to improving the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, reunifying families and addressing the issue of over-representation in out-of-home care.

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and Torres Strait Islander children and families

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