SNAICC

National Voice for our Children

Achieving stability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care

SNAICC POLICY POSITION STATEMENT

JULY 2016

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OVERVIEW

Like all children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect, and in stable and supportive family and community environments. Each child's wellbeing and ongoing best interests should be the priority of those who care for them. **For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are harmed or at risk of harm and in need of alternative care, their protection is our priority.**

For children who are placed in out-of-home care, stability of relationships and identity are vitally important to their wellbeing and must be promoted. In recent years, state and territory child protection authorities have increasingly used a range of case management measures that seek to promote stability through longer-term care arrangements for children. These vary in detail in each jurisdiction but are often broadly described as *permanency planning*. A number of jurisdictions have sought to entrench these measures in legislation. The overt rationale for reform has been to provide children in care with "safe, continuous and stable care arrangements, lifelong relationships and a sense of belonging." [1]

While SNAICC supports an agenda to improve stability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, we have significant concerns that current and proposed permanency planning measures will not achieve this. Without significant improvement to their design and further safeguards, they will likely cause more harm to children and exacerbate inter-generational harm to families and communities. We believe that current approaches are not sufficiently flexible or attuned to the reality that, **for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child, their stability is grounded in the permanence of their identity in connection with family, kin, culture, and country.**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
TO ADVANCE STABILITY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN INCLUDE:

1. Child protection legislation, policy and practice guidelines and decision-making are reviewed and amended to ensure effective safeguards and differential recognition of the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to safe and stable connections to kin, culture and community.
2. All governments increase investment to ensure access to community controlled holistic, best practice, intensive family support, preservation and reunification services tailored to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to prevent abuse, neglect and removal of children to alternative care, and to promote family restoration where children have been removed.
3. Mechanisms are established to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled agencies, families and children to participate in all decisions relating to the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, particularly those relating to longer-term or permanent care.

SNAICC believes that a hold on long term court orders placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and risking extinguishment of their links to family and culture is essential for a two year period while these recommendations are implemented to prevent further harm to children and exacerbation of inter-generational trauma to families and communities.

PERMANENCY PLANNING TRENDS

Each state and territory has a child protection order available in legislation that transfers exclusive parental responsibility to a person, other than the child's biological parents, until the child is 18 years old. While these orders are not new in child protection legislation, in recent years there have been strong trends in policy and legislative reform to increase the focus on, and expedite timeframes for, the use of these orders by child protection authorities and the courts. Over the last two years permanency-focused legislative reform has been undertaken in New South Wales, Victoria, and the Northern Territory, and tabled in discussion papers on legislative reform priorities in both Queensland and Western Australia.

Legislated timeframes for permanency planning have been recently introduced in Victoria and New South Wales, and are provided for in Tasmania. These provisions seek to limit the time during which reunification (also known as *restoration*) of children with their biological parents is pursued. Victorian legislation requires the application of a permanent care objective where a child has been in out-of-home care for a cumulative period of 12 months or 24 months in exceptional circumstances.[2] In New South Wales, the Children's Court is required to make a determination as to whether a plan that pursues restoration is appropriate within 6 months of an interim out-of-home care order for a child under 2 years of age, and 12 months for a child over 2 years of age.[3] In Tasmania, the Magistrates' Court must consider a long-term guardianship order where a child has been in out-of-home care for a continuous period of 2 years.[4] Only in Victoria are permanent care orders coupled with restrictions on the child's contact with their birth parents, which is limited to 4 times per year.[5]

A range of safeguards are legislated to varying degrees to protect the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in respect of permanency planning. All jurisdictions have general provisions regarding the maintenance of cultural identity and connection, including a form of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*, but there are variations on the extent of requirements and how they are implemented. For example, in Victoria a court must not make a permanent care order unless an Aboriginal agency recommends the making of the order,[6] whereas Queensland and South Australia have more general provisions requiring that an Aboriginal agency be given the opportunity to participate in the decision. Other jurisdictions have less prescriptive requirements to consult with or receive submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, rather than an independent agency. In all states and territories parents have either the right to appeal the making of a permanent care order, or to apply for a revocation or variation of the order, or all of these – except the Northern Territory, where parents cannot apply for a revocation or variation of the order.[7]

The Northern Territory introduced permanent care orders in 2015 and is the only jurisdiction not to place any restrictions on the making of such an order beyond general pre-requisites and principles in the relevant Act. The Northern Territory Act lacks safeguards commonly present in other jurisdictions, such as provision for parental contact, parental rights to apply for revocation of an order, and restrictions on permanent placements for Aboriginal children in non-Indigenous care.

Note: A comparative table of relevant legislative provisions prepared by King & Wood Mallesons is available accompanying this position statement on the SNAICC website.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONCEPTS OF PERMANENCE

Permanency in the care and protection sector has been defined as comprising three key aspects, "relational permanence (positive, caring, stable relationships), physical permanence (stable living arrangements), and…legal arrangements."[8] Recent state and territory reforms have tended to focus on the latter two. SNAICC believes that this has been to the detriment of key aspects of relational permanence that are central to the wellbeing and lifelong outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The theory underpinning many permanency planning reforms asserts that the sooner an enduring attachment with a carer can be established, the greater stability can occur, and that this is a better outcome for a child's wellbeing.[9] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people commonly question this narrow construct of attachment theory that centres stability on the singular emotional connection between a child and a carer. This has been described as "inconsistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values of relatedness and child-rearing practices."[10]

Modern applications of attachment theory allow for attachment to both parents and also with grandparents and other relatives and care-givers.[11] This less fixed, more dynamic understanding is also reflected in the *best interests principle* in international child rights law that calls for consideration of the particular circumstances of each individual child.

Reflecting research and the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, SNAICC asserts that stability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children does not rely exclusively on developing particular bonds with a single set of parents or carers, or on living in one house. There are differences in family life across Nations, groups and families, but many long-practiced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander models of child rearing hold that "…children are part of a system of care…described as *intermittent flowing care* (Wharf 1989), (with) different kinship relationships with various members of extended families and often move between…or indeed outside it."[12] Stability for children within these systems stems from being *grown up* and cared for within extended family and kin networks that form "the foundations of their identity, culture and spirituality."[13]

Canadian research has directly linked a lack of continuity of personal identity for First Nations young people to increased rates of youth suicide.[14] The research has connected the individual wellbeing of young people to the cultural continuity of their communities, finding that where a set of cultural connection, practice, and self-governance factors are present, suicides for First Nations young people reduce to zero.[15] In the Australian context, Pat Anderson AO, has described the connections that underpin stability of identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

"OUR IDENTITY AS HUMAN BEINGS REMAINS TIED TO OUR LAND, TO OUR CULTURAL PRACTICES, OUR SYSTEMS OF AUTHORITY AND SOCIAL CONTROL, OUR INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS, OUR CONCEPTS OF SPIRITUALITY, AND TO OUR SYSTEMS OF RESOURCE OWNERSHIP AND EXCHANGE. DESTROY THIS RELATIONSHIP AND YOU DAMAGE – SOMETIMES IRREVOCABLY – INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS AND THEIR HEALTH."[16]

Thus, **permanence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is identified by a broader communal sense of belonging; a stable sense of identity, where they are from,**[17] **and their place in relation to family, mob, community, land and culture.**

"EARLY INTERVENTION SUPPORTS ARE REQUIRED TO PREVENT CHILDREN ENTERING CARE"

OUR CONCERNS

SNAICC BELIEVES THAT CURRENT POLICY AND REFORMS THAT SEEK TO EXPEDITE PERMANENT CARE ARE NOT APPROPRIATE TO ACHIEVE STABILITY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE, AND WILL CAUSE MORE HARM.

Further, SNAICC believes that mainstream notions of stability implicit within permanency measures have not adequately examined what stability is from the perspective of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child, nor the most appropriate ways to support that stability for children.

Regardless of the intentions that underpin permanency measures, **the permanent removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families presents harrowing echoes of the Stolen Generations** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Permanency measures tend to reflect an underlying assumption that a child in out-of-home care experiences a void of permanent connection that needs to be filled by the application of permanent care orders. This understanding is flawed in its failure to recognise that children begin their out-of-home care journey with a permanent identity that is grounded in cultural, family and community connections. This is not changed by out-of-home care orders. Inflexible legal measures to achieve permanent care may actually serve to sever these connections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in breach of their human rights, and break bonds that are critical to their stability of identity while they are in care and later in their post-care adult life.

This section details a number of our specific concerns regarding the design and application of permanency measures.

(A) LIMITED COMPLIANCE WITH THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILD PLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle has been developed to support and maintain the safe care and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families, communities and cultures. Research has confirmed that the history and intent of the Principle is about far more than a decision about where and with whom a child is placed.[18] Its purpose and key elements require early intervention supports to prevent children entering care; supports for children to maintain and re-establish cultural connections in out-of-home care; efforts for reunification; and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and organisations are involved in decision making, service design and service delivery.[19]

There remains inconsistent and ineffective implementation, and in some settings misunderstanding, of the Principle across jurisdictions,[20] which has significant implications for permanency planning. Practical concerns include failures to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and inadequate efforts to consistently look for placement options in consultation with family and community at each stage of the management of a child's care arrangements. Lack of culturally appropriate kinship carer identification and assessment processes have also been identified as significant concerns.

In this context, permanent care orders risk severing cultural connections in circumstances where children are in placements that are disconnected from their families and communities. Where permanent care orders contain no requirements for the ongoing maintenance of cultural connections, the risk is even greater.

(B) INADEQUATE PARTICIPATION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES IN DECISION MAKING

SNAICC notes the lack of effective consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people independent of government agencies in child protection decision-making that has been recognised repeatedly in state and territory child protection systems inquiries over the last 10 years.[21]

The failure to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in decision-making means that many decisions are made without adequately addressing the cultural needs of the child, and without identifying the safe care options that exist within families and communities. Roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies to participate in child protection decision-making have been established state-wide in Victoria and Queensland, and to a lesser extent in South Australia. However, these services have been inadequately resourced and enabled to consistently and effectively influence decision-making.[22] Such services have not been supported in other parts of the country.[23] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family-led Decision Making facilitated by independent community agencies has also been recognised as a valuable model for engaging families to identify and establish safe care options. However, this model has only been implemented state-wide in Victoria, and trialled in limited locations in New South Wales and Queensland.

In a context where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making is limited, expediting permanent care options will contribute to progress poor, ill-informed decisions to become irreversible decisions that can harm children.

(C) INSUFFICIENT SUPPORT TO PRESERVE AND REUNIFY FAMILIES

A lack of adequate focus on family support services and on reunification across jurisdictions is another major concern in the context of permanency planning. Service system responses remain reactive rather than preventative, with only $719 million (or just 16.6 per cent of total child protection expenditure) invested in supporting families, compared to $3.62 billion in child protection and out-of-home care, in the 2014-15 financial year.[24] There must be greater efforts to ensure the provision of intensive and targeted family support services that recognise and address intergenerational trauma as family members struggle with their own health and wellbeing issues at the same time as providing care and support for their children. SNAICC members have also highlighted that a lack of service availability and delays in service provision for families, including waiting lists for housing and other critical services, limit capacity for families to reunify within mandated timeframes. These concerns are particularly evident in remote and isolated locations.

We must still acknowledge the ongoing damage caused by a history of separation from culture in the context of decision-making about long-term care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.[25] A lack of investment to heal and rebuild families and communities should never be used as justification for the use of permanency planning measures that can further devastate them.

Given the lack of support available to vulnerable families, both before and after children are removed to alternative care, there is a significant risk that a focus on permanent care planning could consolidate inter-generational family and community breakdown. SNAICC believes that promoting and supporting the preservation and restoration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to provide safe care for their children must be given priority over permanency planning approaches.

(D) ONGOING SUPPORT FOR KINSHIP AND FOSTER CARERS

SNAICC is concerned that permanency planning will be used as a measure to shift responsibility for addressing serious care issues to individual carers. Governments bear responsibility for a fully funded and effective alternative care system that complies with human rights and moral obligations to children. In its review of long-term guardianship orders in New South Wales, the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) has highlighted the lack of service supports provided to carers when permanent orders are made, despite the high therapeutic care needs of many children in out-of-home care who are impacted by trauma.[26] Similar experiences have been reported in other states.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families provide a large proportion of out-of-home care in Australia, caring for over half of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care. Research has highlighted the additional strain on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities that results from providing high-levels of additional care while also experiencing higher-levels of poverty and disadvantage.[27] This strain is compounded by lower-levels of support provided to kinship carers as compared to foster carers.[28] If permanent care measures are utilised to further reduce the financial and/or practical supports available to kinship and foster carers, this will negatively impact children and the communities that are already extending their resources to care for them.

"FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE PLACED IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE, STABILITY OF RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITY ARE SO VERY IMPORTANT TO THEIR WELLBEING AND MUST BE PROMOTED. FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN, WHAT WE NEED TO REMEMBER IS THAT STABILITY IS GROUNDED IN THE PERMANENCE OF THEIR IDENTITY IN CONNECTION WITH FAMILY, KIN, CULTURE, AND COUNTRY."

(E) LAW AND POLICY CONTRARY TO HUMAN RIGHTS

SNAICC believes permanency measures have also been developed without sufficient attention to the international child rights framework with its knowledge base of policy and principles drawn from comprehensive research and best practice. This framework includes obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the insights of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comments on Indigenous Children (No.11) and the Best Interests Principle (No.14).

Without reference to such a framework, there is a high risk that permanency planning will primarily serve the interests of governments in avoiding risk and obligations of support, and increase the likelihood of practices that will cause or continue individual, community and inter-generational harm rather than protecting children.

SNAICC calls for permanency measures to comply with our international human rights obligations. In particular we note that Article 3(1) of the UNCRC provides that "in all actions concerning children…the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." The *best interests* principle calls for consideration of the individual circumstances of each child in all relevant decisions. In the context of child protection decision-making the UNCRC requires that a child not be separated from their parents unless such separation is necessary in the best interests of the child, that parents and all interested parties participate in proceedings, and that children have the right to maintain contact with their parents (Article 9). Children's participation in the decisions that affect them is also required by Article 12. Article 25 of the UNCRC holds governments responsible to provide a child placed in care with the right to periodic review of their circumstances.

Prescriptive permanency measures that limit ongoing consideration of the best interests of the child or periodic review of their circumstances, or that exclude the views of children and parents from consideration, or that place mandatory limits on parental contact, are contrary to these rights.

In its General Comment 11, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has also noted that:

> "WHEN STATE AUTHORITIES…SEEK TO ASSESS THE BEST INTERESTS OF AN INDIGENOUS CHILD, THEY SHOULD CONSIDER THE CULTURAL RIGHTS OF THE INDIGENOUS CHILD AND HIS OR HER NEED TO EXERCISE SUCH RIGHTS COLLECTIVELY WITH MEMBERS OF THEIR GROUP…THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY SHOULD BE CONSULTED AND GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS ON HOW THE BEST INTERESTS OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN GENERAL CAN BE DECIDED IN A CULTURALLY SENSITIVE WAY."

The importance of participation in decision-making for Indigenous peoples is also well established in international law including the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thus, **when permanent care decisions are made without representative consultation with the child's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, they violate the best interests principle for that child.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have rights under the UNCRC to practice and enjoy their cultures (Article 30), and for due regard in decisions about out-of-home care to the desirability for continuity of their cultural background (Article 20(3)). Permanent care decisions that do not make adequate provision for actively maintaining a child's cultural connections are inconsistent with the child's rights.

These international principles should underpin the approach to child protection decision-making for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The case for care and attention to these principles must also acknowledge the circumstances of our recent history in child protection decision-making. This includes recognition of the ongoing impact of the past policies of child removal in terms of personal tragedy and damage to the cultural and collective rights of so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people.

"IN ALL ACTIONS CONCERNING CHILDREN...THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD SHALL BE A PRIMARY CONSIDERATION."

OUR SOLUTIONS

(A) PRINCIPLES FOR STABILITY AND PERMANENCY PLANNING

IN ORDER TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS RAISED IN THIS PAPER, SNAICC CALLS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN STABILITY AND PERMANENCY PLANNING TO RECOGNISE THE FOLLOWING HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PRINCIPLES:

1. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have rights of identity that can only be enjoyed in connection with their kin, communities and cultures.** In accordance with the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*, their rights to stay connected with family and community must be upheld and the child, their families and communities enabled to participate in decision-making regarding their care and protection. There must be consistent and comprehensive consideration of the hierarchy of placement options, culturally appropriate kinship carer identification and assessment, and regular review to give priority for placement with a child's family and community before considering permanent care.

2. **Permanent care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should only be considered where the family has been provided with culturally appropriate and ongoing intensive and targeted family support services,** and there has been an appropriate independent assessment that there is no future possibility of safe family reunification.

3. **Traditional adoption that severs the connection for children to their families and communities of origin is never an appropriate care option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children,** except as it relates to traditional Torres Strait Islander adoption practices.

4. **Decisions to place an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child in permanent care should only be made with the appropriate and timely review of the child's individual circumstances, and with informed support for the decision from an appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled agency.**

5. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations must be resourced and supported to establish and manage high-quality care and protection-related services,** and to make decisions regarding the care and protection of children and young people in their own communities.

6. **Permanency should never be used as a cost saving measure in lieu of providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities with adequate and appropriate support.** The burden of care held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities should be adequately resourced, whether placements are temporary or permanent.

7. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations must lead the development of legislation and policy for permanent care of their children based on an understanding of their unique kinship systems and culturally-informed theories of attachment and stability.**

8. **Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are on long-term/permanent orders, genuine cultural support plans must be developed and maintained (including with regular review) on an ongoing basis.**

(B) PRIORITIES FOR REFORM

SNAICC proposes the following **PRIORITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEGISLATION AND POLICY** across all state and territory jurisdictions that will reflect a human rights-based approach to ensuring stability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care:

1. Child protection legislation, policy and practice guidelines and decision-making are reviewed (periodically) to ensure effective and differential recognition of the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to safe and stable connections to kin, culture and community.
   This review should address:
   - the effective implementation of all elements of *the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle*, accompanied by an evaluation framework that is nationally agreed and monitored with regular annual review;
   - the effective application of the *best interests* principle for each child through ongoing assessment of their individual circumstances; and
   - the development, implementation and review of cultural support plans for all placements, with particular attention to longer-term and permanent orders and with reference to an evaluation framework that is nationally agreed and monitored with regular annual review.

2. Mechanisms are established to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled agencies, families and children to participate in all decisions relating to the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children particularly those relating to longer-term or permanent care. In particular, the delegation of guardianship to a community-controlled agency, as has been trialed in Victoria, models of representative community agency participation, and models of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family-led Decision-making, should be considered for broader implementation.

3. All governments invest appropriately to provide access to early intervention, intensive family support and healing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to prevent abuse, neglect and removal of children to alternative care, and to promote family restoration where children have been removed.

4. All governments resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support reunification of children with family.

In the short-term SNAICC recommends a number of specific **priorities for immediate legislative reform** to support implementation of these recommendations, including:

5. That expedited timeframes for permanency planning be amended to provide greater flexibility for the use of a variety of more holistic measures to achieve stability for children, and in particular that the more inflexible provisions of Victorian legislation be repealed, including prescriptive limitations on parental contact which violate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art 9(2)).

6. That governments currently undertaking relevant legislative reform processes, for example in Queensland and Western Australia, respect the principles for permanency planning outlined above, and include the participation of independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies in the design of reforms.

7. That all governments review safeguards to maintain and support cultural connections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for whom permanent orders are made or considered, particularly the Northern Territory, which provides manifestly inadequate protections.

SNAICC proposes the following **PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH:**

8. In seeking to better understand the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, research the causes and factors leading to placement stability and instability and *drift* in care, as well as solutions to improve stability.
9. Consult and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and lead agencies in order to co-design models for planning that promote stability as understood for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children.
10. Follow and support research into models for engaging and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities in planning and decision-making processes to identify safe and stable care options for children (including current QLD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family-led Decision-Making trials).

"WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT RECENT PERMANENCY PLANNING MEASURES ACROSS MANY AUSTRALIAN JURISDICTIONS MAY IN FACT UNDERMINE STABILITY FOR AND DEEPEN HARM TO CHILDREN, AND EXACERBATE INTER-GENERATIONAL TRAUMA TO FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES. WE NEED TO URGENTLY INVEST IN EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES TO PREVENT ABUSE, NEGLECT AND REMOVAL OF CHILDREN IN THE FIRST PLACE, ENSURE OUR PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED IN ALL KEY DECISIONS REGARDING OUR CHILDREN AND THAT ALL CHILD PROTECTION LEGISLATION, POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES RECOGNISE THE UNIQUE RIGHTS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN TO SAFE AND STABLE CONNECTIONS TO KIN, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY."

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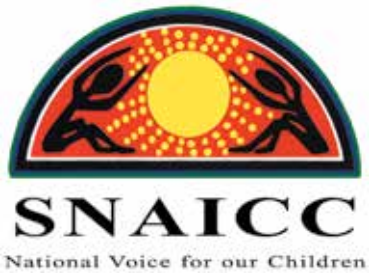

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