



SNAICC  
National Voice for our Children  
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation)  
Suite 8, First Floor,  
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26 September 2017

## **SNAICC CALLS FOR A RESPONSE TO THE VOICES OF CHILDREN IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

**Melbourne, Australia:** SNAICC welcomes the recent report from the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory for its ability to promote the voices of children and young people affected by a child protection system that is in crisis, which, vitally, provides an insight into the real impact of ongoing failures of government to appropriately respond to children in need.

The report, [Voices: What children have told us – Child Protection](#), captures what is often lost in discussions about the best interests of our children – the voices of our children.

What these powerful stories demonstrate is a pattern of denial of basic rights, ongoing policy and practice failures from successive NT governments, and – bluntly – an uncaring approach to caring for our most vulnerable children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 89.1 per cent of all children in out-of-home care in the Northern Territory. This is completely unacceptable.

The experiences courageously shared by children and young people interviewed by the Royal Commission further evidence the extensive reform that is required in the NT child protection system, echoing recommendations from [SNAICC's submission to the Royal Commission](#) submitted in February 2017.

As outlined its submission, SNAICC has made recommendations including that:

- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle must be fully implemented in the Northern Territory child protection system to keep children safely connected to family, community and culture;
- Aboriginal community-controlled agencies that best understand the needs of our children and families must be resourced and enabled to provide early intervention and out-of-home care support services; and
- that the participation of representative Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, children and their family members must be enabled as early as possible before key decisions about removal and placement are *made for* our families and communities. This could be supported through processes such as Aboriginal Family-led Decision Making.

Reflecting the importance of these recommendations, children told the Royal Commission:

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“Because they weren’t the family I grew up with I always felt like the odd one out in the house and I didn’t like that feeling. They were not related to me, they treated me differently and I didn’t belong there.”

– Statement from DB tendered to the Commission 26 June 2017

“I think DCF needs to put Aboriginal kids with family, or with Aboriginal people or help them visit family. I feel like I had to make my family for myself, and the kid shouldn’t have to do that.”

– Statement from CJ tendered to the Commission 31 May 2017

Another key recommendation from SNAICC’s submission is the call for greater focus on prevention and early intervention family support services. Child protection intervention has inter-generational causes and impacts for families and communities and is strongly linked to the trauma that has resulted from the Stolen Generations. The issues that drive child removal can only be addressed through efforts to heal inter-generational trauma and strengthen families, focusing on keeping families safely together and supporting timely and safe reunification. These are the best ways to promote a child’s cultural care, as well as ensure their safety, well-being, and long-term positive life outcomes. Reflecting the enormous gaps in support for families, a child told the Royal Commission:

“The decision to remove us from our Mum and Dad destroyed our family.”

– Statement from DB tendered to the Commission 22 June 2017

Comments from children also reflected SNAICC’s view that out-of-home care is often not the safest place for children and more needs to be done to keep children safe at home, as well as to properly assess and support those providing out-of-home care:

“When the carers wouldn’t feed us my brother and sister would go through the bin and find food for me.”

– Statement from DG tendered to the Commission 22 June 2017

Strong and sustained political will is needed to address long-standing and recognised challenges to improve the safety and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Northern Territory. Federal and Northern Territory Governments must commit to the full implementation and independent oversight of all recommendations from the Royal Commission.

As stressed in SNAICC’s submission to the Royal Commission:

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“After over 30 reviews, inquiries, and Royal Commissions into Australia’s child protection systems over the last 10 years, two previous inquiries into the Northern Territory system in 2007 and 2010, and almost 20 years after the release of the seminal ‘Bringing Them Home’ Report by the Australian Human Rights Commission, we are extremely saddened and appalled to be submitting to yet another inquiry in the Northern Territory in the wake of repeated government failures to implement much needed reform.”

This is the time for genuine partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the Federal and Northern Territory Governments. We are hopeful that the voices captured in this report go some way to inspire an authentic response to the calls of children to create a new system that enables them to thrive, replacing the current system that perpetuates harm.

**ENDS/**

For more information please visit [www.snaicc.org.au](http://www.snaicc.org.au) or contact:

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***About SNAICC – National Voice for our Children:***

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, in particular to ensure their safety, development and well-being.

Founded in 1981, SNAICC was established to engage in activities that promote and accommodate a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Over the past 30 years SNAICC’s efforts has resulted in many key milestones and achievements both in policy developments at state, territory and federal levels and in developing innovative and useful resources for the sector.

SNAICC is governed by an influential Board of Directors made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.

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