



**SNAICC**  
National Voice for our Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and  
Family Centres

*Changing futures with our children and families*

NSW Profiles: May 2018

## Acknowledgments

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 wellbeing.

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.

SNAICC thanks the staff of each participating service for their time in providing information for the development of these profiles and recognises that the data is owned by the services who have kindly shared it with SNAICC for the purposes of these profiles.

## Acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisation
ACFC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centre
CCB	Child Care Benefit
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DE	Department of Education
DECD	Department of Education and Child Development
DET	Department of Education and Training
DH	Department of Health
ELC	Early Learning Centre
FACS	Family and Community Services
FaFT	Family as First Teachers
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
NPA IECD	National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development
OOHC	Out-of-Home Care
PM&C	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
SCfC	Stronger Communities for Children

## Introduction

The establishment of 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) across Australia was a major initiative in the development of integrated services that respond holistically to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young children and their families.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) entered into the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NPA IECD) in support of achieving Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their early years. Under the NPA IECD, the Australian Government and state and territory governments committed \$564 million over six years for a range of Indigenous early childhood initiatives.

ACFCs seek to redress low rates of Indigenous participation in early years services, which requires a 70 per cent increase to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are on par with their non-Indigenous peers. The flexible, inclusive and community-based approach of ACFCs has been successful in facilitating the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to access high-quality early childhood education programs, many for the first time. Engagement with early years services is recognised as critically important for educational and developmental outcomes later in life.

ACFCs connect vulnerable families to an array of integrated services designed to meet locally determined priorities and needs. As a trusted 'one-stop shop' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who would otherwise be unlikely to access any other service supports, ACFCs have a significant impact in improving the safety, health and wellbeing of families and communities. ACFCs are uniquely placed in their delivery of culturally strong services, designed in a manner where a focus on the employment and training of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff further facilitates the sustainability and empowerment of local communities.

Federal funding for the 38 centres was discontinued in July 2014. The services were then caught in the cross-fire of State-Commonwealth politics and have still not managed to be seen simply as integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services. The Queensland Government continued funding for its ten centres and New South Wales provided temporary funding. Other states, such as South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, managed the centres directly. The Victorian Government continued to see the ACFCs as a Commonwealth responsibility. From July 2018, the ACFCs will face new challenges under the mainstream the Child Care Package, as detailed further in the SNAICC Policy Brief on that issue. Above all, they still just require recognition as integrated culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families experiencing particular disadvantage.

Despite the struggles, the services have flourished, developing deep bonds and strengthening cultural pride within their communities. Many have achieved the highest possible rating of 'exceeding' under the national quality standards. They are

playing a central role in ensuring a good start for some of the most vulnerable children across the country, changing their life trajectory.

SNAICC is developing a series of profiles to provide an overview of the 36 services still operating. The profiles detail the key features of each participating service, namely: programs offered; governance structure; funding; engagement with families and communities; and some highlights on outcomes for children and families. The profiles aim to deepen understanding of the work of these services and their impact, as well as to foster sharing and exchange amongst services themselves.

These profiles will be released on a state-by-state basis, and will then finally be compiled into one report.

## New South Wales Services

In New South Wales:

- 9 ACFCs were established
- 7 centres are still operating
- 2 centres (Brewarrina and Lightning Ridge) are now closed due to lack of funding
- Ballina Aboriginal Child and Family Centre has not yet approved content for this profile.

Name	Location	Parent organisation
<b>NSW</b>		
Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Nowra	Cullunghutti Aboriginal Child and Family Centre Incorporated
Brewarrina Aboriginal Integrated Child and Family Centre	Brewarrina	
Ngallu Wal Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Doonside	Childrenfirst
Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Gunnedah	
Lightning Ridge Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Lightning Ridge	
Waranwarin Tharawal Child and Family Centre	Minto	Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation
Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Mt Druitt	Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Corporation
Nikinpa Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Toronto	Muloobinba Aboriginal Corporation
Ballina Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	West Ballina	Bunjum Aboriginal Co-operative

These services serve a very high proportion of Aboriginal children in their communities and have high levels of Aboriginal staff.

	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children participating in an early learning program	What proportion is this of all the children participating in an early learning program	Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers receiving a service from the ACFC
<b>Cullunghutti</b>	71	92%	70%
<b>Ngallu Wal</b>	39	77%	80%
<b>Winanga-Li</b>	87	75%	88%
<b>Yenu Allowah</b>	38	97%	72%

<b>Waranwarin Tharawal</b>	93	97%	74%
<b>Nikinpa</b>	80-90	86%	72%

## Governance

In NSW, centres were established through a partnership with mainstream children's service providers and then transitioned to full Aboriginal control. Now six out of the seven centres still operating are run by an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation.

All centres have a 100 per cent Aboriginal board. All centres have strong partnerships with other community-controlled organisations, mainstream service providers and government departments. The centres receive input and guidance from parents, the community and local elders in different ways, including open days, feedback forms and regular surveys.

At Nikinpa, the Elders group meets regularly to oversee and advise on all activities that run out of the centre. All service providers have to first meet with the Elders group and present who they are and what they want to do at the centre. This helps to raise awareness and support in the community, in addition to ensuring all services are culturally appropriate and engaging.

## Funding

	State	Federal	Other
<b>Cullunghutti</b>	✓ FACS	✓ IAS	✓ childcare fees
<b>Ngallu Wal</b>	✓ FACS	✓	✓ FNSW
<b>Winanga-Li</b>	✓ FACS	✓ IAS	✓ childcare fees
<b>Yenu Allowah</b>	Preferred not to share		
<b>Waranwarin Tharawal</b>	✓ FACS	✓ IAS – Family programs only	✓ childcare fees
<b>Nikinpa</b>	✓ DET	✓	✓ childcare fees

*Funding arrangements as described by interview participants, November 2016-February 2017.*

All centres receive state funding from FACS. Four out of six centres receive IAS funding. Nikinpa applied for IAS funding but was not successful.

Most centres charge child care fees, which vary according to a family's financial situation.

Waranwarin Tharawal and Yenu Allowah presently experience a funding gap. Nikinpa Centre Manager Emma Beckett describes the centre’s funding situation as “barely sufficient”.

Yenu Allowah CEO Christine Foreshow shares, “We struggle to plan long term because we’re funded for short periods. We have a 12 month contract and maybe we’re OK now, but again that’s based on our contractual acceptance for the funding.”

Waranwarin Tharawal’s funding from FACS has not been confirmed as of yet for the new financial year. For other centres that have adequate funding at present, there is nevertheless little security, and funding is often only sufficient to cover present operations.

## Services

	Cullunghutti	Ngallu Wal	Winanga-Li	Yenu Allowah	Waranwarin Tharawal	Nikinpa
Childcare	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Early childhood learning programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visiting health professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allied health services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family and parenting support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Housing, Centrelink and/or legal assistance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Elders group	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Cultural programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Community events	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*\*The ACCHO facilitates Elders groups on a different site, but Elders are very much engaged throughout the centre.*

### Cullunghutti service highlights

Cullunghutti ACFC has a 40-place long day care with strong allied services wrapped around, including a paediatrician, occupational therapist, psychologist, dietician and antenatal/prenatal nurses and family community service. The centre also runs various family programs, with its community connection worker, behavioural management program, early links workers, education officer and family services officer.

### Ngallu Wal service highlights



At Ngallu Wal ACFC, different activities run every day of the week, including:

- Monday – 123 Magic Workshops, Centrelink Outreach Worker, Aboriginal Women’s Group
- Tuesday – Wolkara Elders Group (Red Cross), Financial & Legal Assistance, Youth Drop Inn Centre, Outreach Health Program for Elders
- Wednesday – Aboriginal Mental Health Outreach Clinic, Aboriginal Homework Centre, Bonding and Attachment Workshop
- Thursday – Budget Cooking Program, School Readiness Program
- Friday – Supported Playgroup, Dilly Bag, Outreach Health Assessments for Children

Robert Stewart, Centre Manager, shares that Ngallu Wal provides families within the Blacktown LGA with family support services when in crisis. Ngallu Wal has received funding for a Connected Beginnings Program which aims to support the integration of Early Childhood, maternal and child health, educational and family support services to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community and provide assistance to children birth-eight years to achieve the learning and development outcomes required for a positive transition to school.

During 2018 Ngallu Wal will also host many community events at the centre ranging from Bicycle Road Safety and financial management to workshops on difficult child behaviours and a Kids and Families Disco.

## Winanga-Li service highlights

Winanga-Li ACFC uses an approach to support that empowers people and recognises that walking alongside them supports their ability to develop their knowledge, skills and abilities to be self-determining and responsible for their choices and decisions. This includes understanding their human and legal rights, and abiding by the rights and responsibilities that apply to receiving a service.

Within the centre each person receives a service that respects their rights and maximises their choices for social participation and cultural inclusion. Specific programs include:

- Early Linkers and Ability Link Workers
- Aboriginal Child and Youth
- Three Family Support Workers
- All meals, nappies and transport to and from the centre for the (number of children) attending Early Childhood Education and Care each day
- Immunisations
- Occupational and Speech Therapy
- Podiatrist visits
- Health checks, including eye checks
- Pathways to Referrals to medical specialists
- Antenatal and early childcare monthly information and support
- Transition to School
- Court Support
- Catering for events
- Fun days for multiple communities within the region

- Kids Club
- Supported Playgroups
- Food Bank
- Big Sis Little Sis Program
- Primary and high school support programs
- Elder's group
- Swimming lessons for disadvantaged children
- Service outreach to families
- Circle of Security Programs
- Disability service
- Men's Program

## Yenu Allowah service highlights

At Yenu Allowah ACFC, child and family health is supported through an extensive range of freely available on-site primary and allied health services, delivered through strong partnerships with other service providers. These include:

- speech
- immunisations
- dental health checks
- hearing screenings
- antenatal and postnatal maternal health assessments
- partnership with the University of Wollongong Early Start Network – identified as an Engagement Centre

A comprehensive case management approach ensures that families at Yenu Allowah receive wraparound services and access to diverse cultural and community programs, including:

- *Transition to School* program through the long day care service
- parenting support programs, including community referrals
- a twice weekly *Strong, Proud and Deadly* Program for school age children in out-of-home care
- an annual Family Fun Day, providing information and service outreach to families
- a yearly welcoming event for new babies and families that have moved into the area

## Nikinpa service highlights

Nikinpa ACFC runs child care five days a week, preschool four days a week and playgroup weekly. They also have a comprehensive transition to school program run in partnership with the local primary school across the road.

They have established several partnerships with other service providers who provide a weekly service to members of our community:

- Monday – Relationships Australia counselling service and homework centre
- Tuesday – Awabakal AMS outreach clinic
- Wednesday – speech pathology
- Thursday – psychology services

- Friday – Aboriginal child and maternal health service

The centre also has visiting allied health professionals that work from Nikinpa on a monthly basis, including chronic care, podiatry and a dietician. More targeted programs are offered over the year to redress different needs in community such as: PPP; Circle of Security; Cert. III TAFE courses and Learner Driver Programs.

Nikinpa facilitates a number of community groups weekly, such as a didgeridoo group, weaving groups and a Let's Talk Tucker healthy cooking group, and offers the service to various local networks.

Looking forward Nikinpa is planning work to reduce family violence and to better support local Aboriginal youth.

### Waranwarin Tharawal service highlights

Waranwarin Tharawal incorporates an early learning centre that provides long day care and an Out of School Hours program catering for families from six-weeks-old to primary school care every day. Community events are strongly supported, with Centre Manager, Jodie Bell, highlighting that, "78 visitors attended our Easter celebrations this year, including parents, carers, aunties, uncles and grandparents. This is additional to our normal enrolments on the day. We are invested in our community and our community are invested in us."

**Additional services at Waranwarin Tharawal include;**

- Weekly visiting allied health team including speech, occupational therapist and child psychologist
- Hearing Clinics
- Vision Checks
- Child Family Health Nurse Monthly
- Dental Health Checks
- Visiting Paediatrician
- Family Holiday Activities
- Deadly Homework Clubs
- Playgroups
- Parenting Programs – Triple P and Circle of Security
- Family Camp
- Community Kitchen/Garden
- Partnership with the University of Wollongong Early Start Network – identified as an Engagement Centre
- Partnership with Uniting, particularly with the Aboriginal Early Linkers
- Partnership with Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation

### **Engagement with families and communities**

All centres have had new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families accessing services due to word of mouth, referrals, changes of residence, staff engagement with community and increased/new services. All centres stressed the importance of offering integrated services under the one roof and focusing on the socio-emotional wellbeing of clients as well as addressing physical and medical needs.

Yenu Allowah CEO, Christine Foreshew, noted that it was very important for the centre to be Aboriginal controlled and community oriented, with culture embedded throughout the centre's activities: "We have people in the Mt Druitt community that want to send their children to an Aboriginal Day Care Centre because they went to an Aboriginal preschool here in Mt Druitt. This is the one that they identify with now."

Cullunghutti Centre Manager, Carol Lymbery, described the importance of supporting Aboriginal children from infancy through to school age: "Babies come in and stay straight through to transition to school – a very strong and stable program!"

The Centre Manager attributed the success of Cullunghutti to many different factors: "I think we've got a high profile in the community. You know, it's seen as being a lovely place to come. The atmosphere here is beautiful. We've got people that are very knowledgeable in terms of cultural issues."

Winanga-Li's services are client- and community-driven and supported by a data collection process, with data reviewed and community needs identified through relationships with community members and other service providers. Centre Manager, Wayne Griffith, shares, "Cultural safety is integral, with a strong focus on clients being made aware of their rights and empowered to exercise them. Our internal communication systems and processes support learning and improving culture, encouraging staff and clients to engage in informing service directions and development."

## **Workforce and community development**

All centres assist staff to become formally accredited as well as providing opportunities for additional training, mentoring and personal and professional development to ensure staff are highly qualified and able to support families more effectively.

Most centres also provide training and support around trauma-informed practice. In the words of Ngallu Wal Centre Manager, Robert Stewart, "We acknowledge the fact that most Aboriginal people are affected by some level of generational trauma and we try and support each other as best as we can to overcome these struggles."

To support its staff, Winanga-Li has developed user-friendly handbooks specific to their program level outcomes and reporting. This enables staff to work independently and highlights areas for professional development. The centre supports staff with traineeships and ongoing educational and professional development through the Smart and Skilled Initiative. Recent examples of training include: First Aid, Diabetes

Management Training, Identify and Respond to Risk of Harm, Trauma Informed Care, Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid and Triple P.

Ngalla Wal also provides broader supports for community members, including a Certificate III in Hospitality.

Cullunghutti Centre Manager, Carol Lymbery, sums up the magnitude of their efforts to ensure a strong workforce informs a high-quality service: “If you look at our early childhood service, we’ve only been running it for a year and it’s just been accredited by the Australian national early childhood accreditation council [ACECQA] and we received ‘exceeding high quality’...So for a new service that has a lot of families with a lot of disadvantage, it’s been amazing!”

Waranwarin Tharawal Centre Manager, Jodie Bell, shares, “We pride ourselves in giving local families opportunities to be in paid employment and have a great relationship with the Children Services Unit at South West Sydney Council, with 17 of 23 staff being fully qualified Aboriginal staff or completing traineeships.”

## **Successful outcomes for families**

### A Cullunghutti story

Becky is a four-year-old Aboriginal girl being raised in kinship care by her grandmother. Becky recently received cochlear implants due to hearing loss, which made her reluctant to talk very much and alienated from her friends.

Her grandmother thought it would be wonderful for Becky to learn how to swim but didn’t know how to go about this on her own and lessons were too expensive.

In order to best support Becky, the early links worker at Cullunghutti ACFC organised for all the pre-school aged children engaged with the centre to have access to eight discounted swimming lessons. Cullunghutti ACFC also sourced donations of goggles and towels and provided transport to and from the pool. Many parents and staff volunteered to help out.

Becky’s performance in the swimming lessons was amazing. The Centre Manager, Carol Lymbery, observed that, “It’s really important for that little girl to be able to swim with her friends because she is already alienated enough with her hearing loss.

“It was just beautiful: it started with just one child with a disability, but most of these children have a disability because of their trauma background...So all these children just had the most amazing time having eight swim safety lessons.”

It was such a success that next year the council has guaranteed free swimming lessons. However, Carol emphasised that the centre was only able to run programs like this given they had “that little bit of extra resources”. Having the funds to employ

staff who are not only involved in the early learning centre is crucial for achieving strong and holistic outcomes for children like Becky.

### A Ngallu Wal story

A 24-year-old Aboriginal father, Robert, whose 4-year-old daughter is enrolled at Ngallu Wal child care centre, turned up at the centre and staff noticed he seemed distressed and anxious. Robert was at the time experiencing drug-induced psychosis and suicidal thoughts.

The Centre Manager spent five hours talking with Robert and eventually, with his approval, drove him to the GP to arrange medication and referred him to the local alcohol and drug centre for support. Staff followed up with him the following morning, arranged transport to his appointments, and helped with referrals to a rehabilitation facility, where he successfully completed a six-month program.

After a period of relapse, Robert now reports being drug free and is focussing on his family and work. Robert is now reconnected with his daughter and partner and they all live together and have just had their second child.

Ngallu Wal Centre Manager, Robert Stewart, believes that it is incredibly important for services to be able to provide holistic and proactive support for clients who are often experiencing crisis in many aspects of their life.

“I don’t regret going that extra mile for this young man...he has turned his life around and is giving it a go. I think that is all any community worker can hope for. At Ngallu Wal we do try and really help our people. Our name means “we care” so it is part of our everyday practices.”

### A Nikinpa story

Nikinpa ACFC Centre Manager, Emma Beckett, stresses that it takes time and ongoing commitment to support families through difficult periods and link them with the right services and supports when they are ready.

Emma describes a family who came in on the first day with three small kids. The father of the family was an Aboriginal man in a professional position within the community. One of his children was eventually diagnosed with a disability and they have really struggled with the diagnosis.

Nikinpa has supported the family every step of the way through the diagnosis process, assisted with referrals and have helped the family to understand their child and his needs, and to be better able to communicate with him. Nikinpa also supported the child and family through the transition to school.

“It’s changed the family’s life. They now know how to support the child and get him the things he needs, and how to prepare him for changes and other circumstances

where he will be out of his comfort zone. He's a different child now and they're a different family.

"I think one of the most important things Nikinpa has done for this family is to help them to come to the realisation that it is OK, that there is a very wide range of 'normal', that all kids learn in different ways and it's about adapting the things you do to suit the individual child's needs. The family's confidence grew so much once they had a better understanding of their child and what he needed to succeed. They were not afraid to advocate for him, they were empowered, and their son has benefited from this."

### A Winanga-Li story

A young Aboriginal girl from Armidale has been supported by a Winanga-Li Early Linker for two years, along with her younger brother and sister. This young girl has a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) level 1, ADHD, Dyspraxia and a mild intellectual disability.

Winanga-Li has been able to sort and process all of her NDIS applications, assisted her to get a referral to Services Our Way through ADHC to help access resources she needed. The Early Linker was a tremendous support in meetings and appointments, as the child's mother had to care for her two younger siblings, their father and the children's grandmother.

The mother has got quite a lot on her shoulders with everyone she supports, so the help and support Winanga-Li has provided to the child and her family improved the lives of the whole family.

The young girl's mother had discussed with Winanga-Li her dream for her daughter to go to New England Girls School (NEGS) once she transitions into high school, but lack of money would mean that this would not be possible. Winanga-Li supported her to access a scholarship to attend the school this year as a boarder. This was not within the realm of possibility for many reasons just a couple of years ago. This young girl had expressed to her mother that there is no way that she would have had the confidence to board and be away from her family without the support she has gained from Winanga-Li.

### Waranwarin Tharawal success stories

Centre Manager, Jodie Bell, shares: "Both the below stories demonstrate that our centre is a place where families access a range of services and continue to stay active in the centre through multiple programs. Staff at the centre have built meaningful positive relationships through our education, health and community programs. Both stories demonstrate the benefits of an integrated service and the continuous engagement that families can have. Families can start with us and continue to access services throughout their parenting and childhood."

#### **Deadly Homework Club**



Brett is five years old and was diagnosed in 2016 with mild autism before starting school in 2017. Brett attends Deadly Homework Club at Waranwarin on Monday afternoons from 3.30pm-4.30pm. Brett is a quiet child and does not speak much. Brett's mum is worried and nervous about him. The Program Coordinator of the Deadly Homework Club sits down with mum and explains Brett's diagnosis and works with the family to figure out how they can best assist Brett while he is at Homework Club. Staff at the Homework Club notice the improvement with Brett and how he engages at the centre, especially with improved social and self-confidence skills. At the end of the session for example, children participate in a story telling activity by asking every child what they did today at school, what they are going to work on for the rest of the week, and share what they had done on the weekends. Brett now shares his story with a proud smile on his face.

Brett received an award at the end of 2017 for most improved in all aspects of learning in Kindergarten at Campbelltown North Public School. Brett's mum provides staff with positive feedback of the positive learning experience and role that the Deadly Homework Club has played in Brett's progress.

### **Engagement of employment and confidence building**

Wanwarin Tharawal Centre Manager shares, "Our program engages many community members and at times we have gone on a journey with our community members when they are improving their lives to be better parents, increase their skills and knowledge, and gain employment."

Kelly is a parent that had her child removed from her care early in her parenting life. Through her participation in playgroup and her approved access visits, Kelly has gone from strength to strength in gaining her child back into her custody and is continuously improving her life. Kelly has been a long-term participant with the program and is now building her skills through study in the area of Community Services Cert II. Kelly's child is now in Year 2 and still participates in the Deadly Homework Club and other age appropriate activities. To give Kelly paid work experience the centre has been able to engage Kelly in a casual role on a needs basis. The role supports parental programs such as Triple P, when participants require child minding. Kelly has a Working With Children's Check and is showing great interest in gaining professional skills.