



**SNAICC**  
National Voice for our Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and  
Family Centres

*Changing Futures with our children and families*

South Australia: August 2018

## Acknowledgments

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.

## About SNAICC

SNAICC – National Voice for our children is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfillment 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.



## Acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled 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 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in early years services, which requires a 70% 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.

Further, 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, 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 their 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 Child Care Package, as detailed further in SNAICC Policy Brief on that issue. Above all, they still 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.

## South Australian Services

In South Australia, four services were established, all of which are still operating.

Name	Location
<b>South Australia</b>	
Ngura Yadurirn Children and Family Centre	Ceduna
Ernabella Aboriginal Children and Family Centre	Pukatja
Gabmididi Manoo Children and Family Centre	Whyalla
Taikurrendi Children and Family Centre	Christies Beach

All the services have a strong focus on Aboriginal children, as reflected in the table below.

	Number of Aboriginal children participating in an early learning program (p.a)	What proportion is this of all the children participating in an early learning program (p.a)	Number of Aboriginal parents/carers receiving a service from the ACFC (p.a)	Percentage of Aboriginal staff in the ACFC
Ngura Yadurirn	94	68%	80+	45%
Ernabella	29-32	97%	60+	66%
Taikurrendi	60	50-60%	40+	50%
Gabmididi Manoo	52	69%	80+	13%

## Governance

Ernabella ACFC is managed through the local school. In general, the school Principals and staff undertake day-to-day decision-making. However, any major decisions must be put to the principal and school council. Ngura Yadurirn, Taikurrendi and Gabmididi Manoo are standalone Children and Family Centres governed by a governing council (Taikurrendi's is called a Parent Advisory Group). They are not run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

In Ngura Yadurirn ACFC, the School Council works in collaboration with an Aboriginal Parent Advisory Group. Gabmididi Manoo ACFC works with a Cultural Advisory Group. The two centres' constitutions state that the governing council should reflect the cultural diversity of the centre.

In Ernabella ACFC, there is an all-Aboriginal Governing Council consisting of major family groups from the community. In Taikurrendi ACFC, approximately half of the members of the Parents Advisory Group are Aboriginal; however, the centre's constitution has no requirement for a certain amount of Aboriginal membership. All centres have partnerships with the local school, government department and relevant community organisations that contribute to supporting effective, responsive service provision to their communities.

## Funding

	DECD	IAS	Other
<b>Ngura Yadurirn</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Ernabella</b>	✓	✓	
<b>Taikurrendi</b>	✓		✓ "grants for Aboriginal participation/attendance"
<b>Gabmididi Manoo</b>	✓	✓	✓ Aboriginal Family Literacy Strategy Grant

The services have a range of funding sources, outlined in the table above.

Ngura Yadurirn ACFC experiences a funding gap, stating that they could do "so much more" with increased funding. Ernabella ACFC's biggest concern is providing transport for families to and from the centre. They would like to have the funds to purchase their own bus. Gabmididi Manoo's bus transport service runs a deficit and they have cut back operation to 2 of 5 days per week because of funding shortages.

All the centres communicated their concern that there was little funding security for the future.



## Services

	Ngura Yadorirn	Ernabella	Taikurrendi	Gabmidici Manoo
Childcare				
Early childhood learning programs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visiting health professionals	✓	✓	✓	✓
Allied health services	✓	✓	✓	✓
Family and parenting support	✓	✓		✓
Housing, Centrelink and/or legal assistance or facilitation				✓
Elders group			✓	
Cultural programs				✓
Community events	✓			✓

Major services are outlined in the table above. All centres are growing or expanding services provided.

### Ngura Yadorirn service highlights

Ngura Yadorirn ACFC runs Preschool, Occasional Care, a Learning Together playgroup, Nunga Playgroup and Transition to School as the early childhood education and care programs. The service also run a range of other parenting and family support programs, including Jump N Jive, Nunga Yarntime, Cooking Together, Creepers and Crawlers, Baby Massage, Circle of Security, Bringing Up Great Kids, Minya Bubs and Gardening Together. Health programs complement these services to respond to community needs, with child and maternal health programs, and occupational therapy information sessions being good examples.

### Ernabella service highlights

Ernabella ACFC offer a families and children playgroup program daily, focused on health and hygiene, learning and play, and nutrition and healthy eating. Child & Adolescent mental Health Services connect with families on site. During 2018, the Child and Family Health Services funding model has been cut. NPY Women's Council visiting teams visit the centre each term. This includes, for example, visits

from the child nutrition and family violence teams. Daily practice for educators is guided by The Families as First Teachers pedagogy.

The service provides an open space, and supplies, to support families' basic needs with a baby bath, laundry and baby supplies. They offer breakfast, a hot meal and fruit every day. They are also introducing programs like a dad's group, girl's night for mum's to have some respite and baby massage. As Ernabella Centre Director shares, "We're trying to make sure every aspect of mum's and baby's lives in the family centre is covered."

### Taikurrendi service highlights

Taikurrendi ACFC runs a preschool, universal and targeted playgroups, and family support services, with allied health services offering complementary programs. The Mens' Group, Elder's Group and Bring Up Great Kids targeted playgroup have been particularly popular.

### Gabmididi Manoo service highlights

Gabmididi Manoo ACFC runs a preschool, occasional care service and a variety of playgroups. Wrapped around these services are a Community Development Coordinator, allied health services and a Family Services Coordinator to provide more specialised one to one supports for families based on their needs. They run some specific programs, such as Circle of Security, Tuning in to Kids, Learning Together at Home, Seasons for Healing, healthy lifestyles program and infant massage. The service funds a bus service that transports children that otherwise would not be able to get to preschool.

## **Engagement with families and communities**

All centres gather feedback from families through parent interviews, surveys, comments books and suggestions box at the centre, as well as conversations with staff and family nights each term. As Ernabella Centre Director, Sinead Peters, shares: "Every day we are talking with families and mums and trying to improve the service and definitely getting their input on what they need. Basically, it's their family centre and I'm just managing it."

All centres have new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families accessing services through referrals and through directly engaging with new and young mothers in particular. Ngura Yadurirn Director, Susie Bowden, stresses that it takes time to develop strong working relationships with families: "We can work in many ways to support families but before the work begins we must build relationships and trust. After three years we are starting to see evidence of families feeling a sense of belonging."

Ngura Yadurirn ACFC also engage families and communities through:

- commissioning artwork by local artists to build the sense of Aboriginal Identity
- providing transport to and from the centre, and
- encouraging a sense of agency through brainstorming group topics and activities with families each term.

Taikurrendi ACFC believes that having longstanding staff has been key to engaging families there: “We’ve been lucky to have a committed team that have been ongoing – staff all started together, and staff are staying! A strong team can support families effectively.” Centre Director, Catherine Cavouras, also notes the importance of strong referral relationships and strong connections with Aboriginal networks: “This has allowed the centre to successfully build and retain numbers – as well as ensuring that if families move, they can be referred elsewhere for ongoing support.”

Gabmididi Manoo ACFC has had a cultural identity group from very early on, which has greatly assisted engagement with Aboriginal families and community. Kellie Bails, Centre Director, shared: “Through this group, Aboriginal families have felt supported to have a voice.” The group led development of a RAP that has guided the ACFC’s work with the community, which has included, for example, development of a space in the garden as a healing space to sit and yarn, with flowers of significance, and developing a DVD for families on the importance of Aboriginal children starting preschool at three years of age. The Centre Director continued: “We keep coming back to that group for ongoing discussions. This has made a huge difference. It is 100% of our Aboriginal families who are our most engaged cohort. They don’t hesitate asking for things. They come and chat to us when they don’t have some of the basics. This is very different to even two years ago.” The collaboration with Wyngbring Jida Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Service has also been important for building relationships and trust with families.

## Workforce and community development

All centres except Gabmididi Manoo have between a half to two thirds of staff identifying as Aboriginal. Aboriginal staff are supported to undertake appropriate certification. This year, at Ngura Yadurirn ACFC for example, two Aboriginal staff members will undertake a university bridging course. At Ernabella ACFC, Aboriginal staff members are working towards a Certificate III in Children’s Services.

Gabmididi Manoo ACFC has struggled to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff. They support students to do placements and encourage them to continue on as teachers. Kellie Bails, Centre Director, shares: “There are very few local people with the required qualifications. We are trying some different approaches. Our non-Aboriginal Community Development Coordinator has just been replaced by an Aboriginal woman she has been mentoring for the role. We are now hoping to recruit an Aboriginal person for her former administrative role. There is slow development in building the Aboriginal workforce.”

## Successful outcomes for families

Taikurrendi ACFC has been running a program within the local high school for three years that aims to support young mothers (14 to 25 years old) to re-engage with their formal education where they left off. According to Centre Director, Catherine Cavouras: “From that, we have had a wave of the children of the young mums attending pre-school at our site. The children transition so beautifully, and the women feel really safe! It’s a wonderful success. ... It has a powerful impact for these children to access early childhood education. Maybe before they wouldn’t have, or maybe not as early, now they already have the connection.”

Ernabella ACFC has almost doubled its attendance in the past two years, with at least 16-17 families attending the centre every day. The Centre Educator thinks it is important that she is familiar with families and active in the community, personally engaging with new parents and encouraging them to come along to the centre. She also stresses that it has taken time to build to this point and it is continually a work in progress: “We have a lot of things in the works that will potentially be really great ... We’re just now getting the ball rolling.”

### A Gabmididi Manoo story

Gabmididi Manoo had an Aboriginal woman come in highly distressed. Her partner was in prison and she was not coping very well. The centre provided wrap around family support services to assist her to get back on track, and got her children engaged in preschool and occasional care. The mum started attending baby playgroup, attended some parenting groups and joined the cultural advisory group.

The Aboriginal woman is now employed as an Aboriginal community engagement officer in the local primary school and has started a social work degree. The mum has said several times to the centre that the support they provided her early on helped her get so much stronger and focused. It gave her confidence and pride in culture. She has even been able to move her kids to the preschool connected to the school they are going to for ease of transition, even though it had no Aboriginal children. She said that she wanted to build the capacity of other centres to work in culturally safe ways with Aboriginal children as well. She has an ongoing close relationship with the centre, bringing children that are struggling over from the school to support them and to help with the pre-schoolers.