

SNAICC NEWS

SNAICC NATIONAL CONFERENCE

27-29 July 2010, Alice Springs



FOR OUR CHILDREN

Local Strengths,
National Challenges

AMPE ANWERNEKENHEKE

Rlterke Akwete
Aneye



Photo: Astri Baker

Nikita Palmer-Sharpe of Larapinta Valley Alice Springs has already packed for the conference

Message from Steve Larkins, SNAICC Chair

Welcome to this special edition of *SNAICC News*. This issue has come out a little early to better advertise our up-coming 2010 SNAICC national conference. I hope you will consider participating in this national event.

This is an exciting time to be involved in the many national initiatives affecting our children, and our conference will be a good time to consider together how our children and families are faring. Likewise for our upcoming Adelaide SNAICC Annual General Meeting. This AGM, as always, is an opportunity for all SNAICC members to reflect on the new opportunities opening up and I urge members to fully engage in the SNAICC National Executive elections.

To help us consider the growth of SNAICC over the last 26 years, this issue includes an enjoyable and thought provoking conversation between our previous SNAICC Chair, Muriel Bamblett AM, and our former Executive Officer Julian Pocock reflecting on their ten year leadership partnership promoting the interests of our children and families.

The Adelaide SNAICC conference in 2007 attracted over 700 delegates from every state and territory. It was the largest ever conference on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and said by many to be simply the best conference ever. The 2010 SNAICC conference will build on this success.

SNAICC now invites Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care leaders, practitioners, policy makers, researchers and government representatives from around Australia to our 2010 national conference in Alice Springs. The conference will be an opportunity to gather and make renewed commitments to our children.

We ask organisations and individuals to submit abstracts for a conference presentation. See page 3 inside this issue for abstract guidelines.

2010 SNAICC National Conference, Alice Springs

Call for abstracts open until 30 October 2009

FEATURES INSIDE THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:

- What is an 'Indigenous focused service?' Ask a Minister NOW (pg 2)
- Conversation between a former SNAICC Chair & EO (pg 8)
- Convention on Rights of the Child is 20 (pg 8)
- 5 tips to develop policies & procedures (pg 14)

With opportunity and change comes the need for vigilance. SNAICC has warmly welcomed the recent federal government initiative to fund 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family centres, however we are concerned to ensure the governance of these developing centres remains consistent with the stated objectives. This matter is covered in more detail inside, and I urge SNAICC supporters to contact our key Ministers to ensure the process remains on track.

I hope you enjoy yet another issue of *SNAICC News*.



SNAICC News is the quarterly newsletter of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc.

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Contributions and feedback to *SNAICC News* are welcome.

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Message from SNAICC EO, Frank Hytten

SNAICC asks YOU to act for Indigenous children & family services NOW



There is one issue that is of considerable and immediate importance on the table right now. We ask our supporters to consider and take action relating to the following matter:

It's about the implementation of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020*. The first three year Action Plan 2009 – 2012 has been released and the process started. A key outcome is that 'Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities'. A critical part of this outcome concerns the promised '35 Indigenous Children and Family Centres' (ICFCs).

These promised ICFCs are clearly based on the Multifunctional Aboriginal Childcare Services (MACS) model, established 25 years ago, based on management for and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This MACS model and practice is widely regarded as 'best practice'. The MACS' success comes despite the fact MACS funding has not kept up with CPI and they received their first and only funding increase in 25 years in 2008. The ICFC model seems far better funded to do the same work – work that many MACS want to do, but can no longer do because their government funding has eroded.

Bureaucracy seems to be changing the intention of Government's program. What were called 'Indigenous Children and Family Centres', are now being called 'Indigenous **focused** Children and Family Centres'. The meaning in the original policy documents has been very watered down.

The term Indigenous Children and Family Centres clearly implies Indigenous control and (primarily) programmatically, culturally and socially Indigenous services. 'Indigenous focused' however does NOT imply Indigenous control – maybe quite the opposite. Further, senior staff from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) have recently stated they understand 'focus' as meaning centres that welcome Indigenous children and families, and that there is no

reason that Indigenous people can't go the inaugural centre meeting and be elected to the Committee of Management. This is far from the intent of the policy.

DEEWR representatives have said MACS could convert to one of the 35 centres' status, providing they surrender their MACS status – meaning, in effect, surrendering their Indigenous control and programming.

This forces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose from two unacceptable options. In spite of all the research, conversations and heartache, there is still a failure by some to understand the core issues around cultural safety, community control and the best way to achieve long-term results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

I think a concerted effort by SNAICC members and others can reverse this slippage of intent of the policy. We need to act in concert and act very soon.

Act NOW

Please email key federal ministers and ask them what they understand by the promise of 35 Indigenous Children and Family Centres and how their governance will be implemented. Email thier state counterparts too.

See www.snaicc.asn.au/policy for a pro-forma letter to send to the federal Ministers below and/or thier state counterparts or email your own question to:

- **The Hon. Kate Ellis MP**, Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care & Youth
E: kate.ellis.mp@aph.gov.au
- **The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP**, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs: E: JMacklin.MP@aph.gov.au
- **The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP**, Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health & Regional Services Delivery
E: minister.snowdon.office@health.gov.au

Together, we can secure a good outcome for our early years services. Keep in touch.

Contact: frank@snaicc.asn.au



SNAICC invites Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander child & family leaders, workers, policy makers, researchers & government representatives from around Australia to our 2010 conference in Alice Springs

Call for abstracts and submissions

Closing date 30 October 2009

Photo: Ian Sweeney

Nikita Palmer-Sharpe of Larapinta Valley will be there to greet you

Abstract & submission guidelines

1. We seek presentations that are evidence based and present outcomes rather than descriptions of services.
2. We encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenters and co-presenters.
3. We are also looking for submissions that are interactive and hands on.
4. Priority will be given to submissions that best achieve conference objectives.

Conference objectives

1. **To share stories and celebrate** different models of locally successful and culturally strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service in early childhood and child and family welfare sectors.
2. **To listen, learn and grow** our knowledge of culture, elders, families and communities in raising children and supporting families.
3. **To challenge governments and others** to act in a way that acknowledges history, respects culture and provides

the services and support families and communities need for bringing up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

4. **To foster leadership** to support strong, culturally safe communities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Presentation types

1. **Short formal paper presentations** (20 minutes maximum with 10 minute question and answer time) will be grouped with related topics in a chaired session. 2 – 3 papers per 90 minute time slot.

2. **Stories, case studies and workshops** (90 minutes) are more informal, may have a participatory, activity and interactive focus. Presentations may be of varying lengths from 10 minutes (for example part of a panel) to 90 minutes.

3. **Discussion circles** of up to 20 people on set topics designed to encourage discussion and sharing of stories in an informal small group setting. Very short papers or stories may be used as a facilitation aid in these groups.

4. **Displays** for the full duration of conference and as part of the program. Presenters will need to be available at their display to answer questions for an interactive session. Display space will be free or at a cost, depending on agency type.

Presenters need to meet their own registration fee & may apply for travel subsidy.

Download the abstract form from www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/conference

Contact

If you need more information or help to complete your abstract form please contact:

Conference Secretariat

Sharyn Low
Ph: 02 4572 3079 Fax: 02 8580 5089
PO Box 4242 Pitt Town NSW 2756

For the correct pronunciation of *Ampe Anwernekenheke*: *Rlterrke Akwete Aneye* go to the SNAICC conference website.

Keynote speaker confirmations, conference events, call for abstract forms and regular updates are available on:

www.snaicc.asn.au/policy/conference

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National Challenges

AMPE ANWERNEKENHEKE

Rlterrke Akwete
Aneye



L-R: Row 1: Di McNaboe, Nicole Blackhall, Dallas Waters Row 2: Judy Breckenridge, Doris Shillingsworth, Christine Fernando Row 3: Jasmine Whitely, Jessica Stewart, Margaret Forrest, Natalie Loy Row 4: Uma Nagamuthu, Dixie Link Gordon, Sue Lindsay, Rebecca Hancock, Ella Munro Row 5: Melissa Stubbings, Angela, Michelle Wellington, Robyn Kuipers, Phil Francis

All Children Being Safe - a culturally appropriate protective behaviours program

The need for a culturally appropriate 'protective behaviours' primary school program was identified by the Green Hill Public School principal. Greenhills then developed a successful whole of community approach has resulted in a resource that can easily be implemented in other communities.

The *All Children Being Safe* program (Green Hill Pilot Program), has been selected as a finalist in the Promoting Health category for the 2009 NSW Health Awards. The program utilises non-threatening ways to help children (primary school students ages 5 to 8 years) feel strong and stay safe in their communities. It also helps children identify their own strengths, builds resilience and introduces them to the idea of support services if they have experienced some form of abuse.

The *All Children Being Safe Program* can be introduced during a six week period and is co-facilitated by teachers, health and community workers and community members in a classroom environment. Parent information sessions are held at the school to inform parents and carers about the program and to gain their support.

The program is based on stories

about bush animals e.g. the Kangaroo, the Echidna, the Kookaburra, the Koala and the King Parrot, that are in an unsafe situation and how they work together to make themselves safe. The use of stories with animal and bird characters in the children's local environment/ area ensures that the program has more significance and meaning.

These stories are supported by a variety of mediums; including music and dance as well as protective behaviour worksheets and craft activities which aim to teach children about safe and unsafe feelings, places, people, build on strengths and celebrate safe communities. This can result in children acquiring additional skills to cope with family violence and other forms of abuse they may be exposed to.

The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet's Tackling Violence Project has funded an *All Children Being Safe Program* train the trainer session for communities in the Tackling Violence Project. Community members from Nowra, Tingha, Windsor, Maclean and Dubbo were invited to Port Macquarie for group training. Participant feedback included

'Fantastic! Great incorporating culture/ language for young people, really looking

forward to running this in our school and community.'

'I think this is a great program that will benefit Aboriginal children and non-Aboriginal children.'



SNAICC also attended the training and promoted our *Through Young Black Eyes Facilitators Guide* on family violence, child abuse and neglect and child sexual assault that compliments the *All Children Being Safe* program.

The *All Children Being Safe* program was developed in partnership with Green Hill Public School, Green Hill Aboriginal Community, NAPCAN, North Coast Area Health Services: Women's Health, and Aboriginal Health, Durri AMS and Schools as Community Centres, Kempsey.

By: Angela Walsh, LOVE BITES & National Manager / Head Trainer NAPCAN, Port Macquarie Contact: angelalovebites@gmail.com



ARMSU, the South Australian IPSU, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. ARMSU Coordinator, Debbie Bond has played a key role in ARMSU from its early days and has also been a member of the SNAICC Executive for many years.

In 1989 Network SA was asked to

ARMSU's 20th birthday: 15 - 16 October

provide culturally appropriate support to the new SA Aboriginal child care MACS services. In the years since, ARMSU has expanded to take on other roles.

Today, ARMSU supports their Aboriginal children's services through on site visits, training sessions, written resources and telephone support.

We have just advertised our latest service, providing video calls by computer, using Skype. ARMSU now also runs programs to support our children in mainstream children's services.

The Aboriginal Services Meetings, organised by Debbie, have gone from strength to strength, as have the services themselves. Their next meeting, 15 - 16 October will be a big birthday celebration!

Edited article by Maureen McGuire, EO Network SA & ARMSU

SNAICC congratulates Maureen McGuire, Debbie Bond, all the other ARMSU services and staff on this big 20th birthday



Happy Birthday! The Convention on the Rights of the Child turns 20

Mark down 20 November in your diary to commemorate the United Nations General Assembly adopting the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) in 1989. Signed by almost all of the members of the

General Assembly, including Australia, the CROC provides a binding commitment to affirm universal human rights for all children. More importantly, it reminds us of what is still to be achieved.

SNAICC thanks the National Children's and Youth Law Centre for permission to use content from its great website - What's Up CROC? www.ncylc.org.au/croc/home.html

The Convention on the Rights of the Child - a short & sweet Q&A:

What is the CROC?

The CROC is a human rights document developed by the United Nations and passed by the UN General Assembly in November 1989. It consists of 54 articles that set out the human rights of children and the obligations of signatory countries.

Who is protected by the CROC?

Everyone who is under 18.

What does the CROC protect?

The CROC includes civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights - and sets out the ways these rights should be ensured for children and young people.

Importantly, the CROC says that children have the right to be protected from exploitation, abuse and neglect and all matters concerning them must be decided on the basis of their best interests. CROC also recognises that children should have their views heard and taken into account, based on their age and maturity.

What does it say about Indigenous children?

The CROC is one of a few international treaties with specific references to Indigenous people. It says that Indigenous children shall not be denied the right to enjoy their culture, to practice their religion or use their own languages.

There is also a General Comment with directions for signatory countries on how the CROC should be interpreted with respect to Indigenous children. This General Comment outlines the importance of Indigenous cultures, protection of Indigenous children's cultural identity through childcare and the need for countries to ensure Indigenous children enjoy the highest attainable level of health.

What are Australia's obligations under the CROC?

The CROC became binding on Australia in January 1991. Under the CROC, Australia agreed to:

- Make CROC known by children & adults
- Ensure the CROC rights are available to all Australian children
- Take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to implement the CROC rights
- Report regularly to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on progress made in ensuring all children enjoy their rights under the CROC.

It is important on the anniversary of the CROC to lobby for the Australian Government to comply with all of its obligations - see below for ways in which you and your organisation can do this!

Who makes sure that rights under the CROC are protected?

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child receives reports from signatory countries every 5 years. It reviews the reports from countries and non-government organisations, and provides public feedback, recommendations and comment.

At the moment, there is also consideration of whether there should be a complaints mechanism, which would allow individuals or groups to bring complaints about alleged breaches of the CROC before a hearing body.

Most importantly, individuals and organisations should be aware of the CROC rights and get involved to make sure that these are protected.

Why is CROC important?

The CROC clearly articulates shared values and celebrates the importance of children. It is an agreed approach for countries on a broad range of issues, including children in wars, child prostitution and detention.

Importantly, it is a means to measure government actions and a way to hold governments to account. It provides a valuable lobbying tool that is recognised at an international level. More broadly, use of

human rights tools and language has driven social change globally, including civil rights and independence movements.

However, the quality of protection of CROC rights depends on the Australian Government implementing it in domestic laws. As international human rights continue to gain increasing prominence, it is important that we make sure that the Australian Government protects all human rights in both theory and practice.

What can your organisation do to support the CROC?

1. Read up and spread the word about the CROC. Have a look at the National Children's and Youth Law Centre website, What's Up CROC for detail and links: www.ncylc.org.au/croc/home.html

2. Celebrate the CROC birthday 20th November – watch the SNAICC website for information about events near you. Tell us about your CROC event!

3. Make CROC part of your work:

- Include in your email signature, letterhead, reports etc, a statement that your organisation supports CROC rights
- Incorporate CROC rights into your governance documents
- Using CROC as a benchmark in developing policies and practice standards for the organisation
- Refer to CROC in any submissions or comments made on new legislation, new policies or proposed new initiatives affecting children
- Involve young people - set up a children's and young person's reference group for your organisation
- Consult regularly with local youth advocacy groups for a youth view
- Press Commonwealth and State governments to incorporate CROC into domestic law and to make greater efforts to comply with CROC
- Run training for staff about the CROC and how it can be integrated into work.

Contact: emily@snaicc.asn.au



Canadian Human Rights Tribunal is underway

First Nations children are drastically over represented in child welfare care, a situation made more dire by the shortfalls in the Canadian Federal Government's child welfare funding.

When voluntary government action did not translate into equal funding for all children's welfare services, the FNCFCFS and AFN decided to rely on involuntary mechanisms. Marshalling evidence and community support, the FNCFCFS and AFN commenced legal action to hold government to account and force equal funding.

In the landmark hearing likely to stretch over several months, the Tribunal will determine whether there has been any discrimination based on a prohibited ground (such as racial discrimination) under the Canadian Human Rights Act. The Tribunal has the power to order an appropriate remedy, and its decision will carry the force of law.

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal is now underway in Ottawa (commenced 14 Sept. 2009).

Cindy Blackstock reports here to all supporters on the first day of proceedings of this historic First Nations event.

Hello Everyone

I just wanted to thank each of you and your organisations for supporting us in our work to achieve equity for First Nations children at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which got underway in Ottawa today.

It was a very historic day today and some of you will understand when I say the skies were blue again as they always are when we work on something important on Jordan's Principle and the inequality in child welfare funding. First of all many thanks to all who came to the tribunal and to all of you who have provided other types of support and encouragement.

A particular thank you to those who, in their own way, marked this historic day with a spiritual ceremony or thought. To set the scene for those of you were not able to be there, the tribunal room looks much like a court room.

Canada was represented by Mr. Mitchell Taylor and Ms. Karen Cuddy. There were five other tables of lawyers and potential intervenors composed of the Assembly of First Nations (including the National Chief), The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (including Elsie Flette, President and Joan Glode, Vice President); Chiefs of Ontario represented by Mike Sherry; and Amnesty International represented by Owen Rees. In the gallery,

people had come from all over Canada and from many walks of life to witness the tribunal. Amongst the people present were Alex Neve, Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada, Les Horne, Canada's first child advocate and member of Defense for Children International; Irwin Elman, child advocate of Ontario; Ed Bianchi of Kairos as well as academics from various universities, members of the community, different faith groups and human rights and child rights advocates

Today the Tribunal Chair made several key decisions - all of which were very positive and all of which Canada opposed: Chiefs of Ontario were granted intervenor status, Amnesty International was granted intervenor status.

The tribunal is adjourned until November 16 with opening statements made by the complainants and the first witness which is likely me. At this point they think I will be on the stand for at least 2-3 days. Please do continue to encourage people in your circle to support the *I am a witness campaign*.

Have a good night

Cindy Blackstock
First Nations Child and Family Caring
Society of Canada

Sign up to witness the historic Canadian Human Rights Tribunal hearing on First Nations child welfare www.fnwitness.ca



Placement Services Team: Marg Smallwood, Warren Wesser, Janine Man, Malcolm Gooda, Margaret Aaskov

New world for Rockhampton CQAICCA foster carers

Central Queensland AICCA in Rockhampton welcomes on board the non-Indigenous foster carers for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

CQAICCA CEO, Donna Klein said: 'We celebrate every two weeks with a gathering in the park. Last fortnight we had over 40 Indigenous and non-indigenous children with their foster carers having a wonderful time and being afforded the opportunity to sit together, discuss, debate and share ideas for ensuring that they provide best possible care.'

'These non-Indigenous foster carers are

leaving mainstream services for CQAICCA as they have felt neglected, and neither respected nor supported. We are excited to be able to not just support our Indigenous foster carers but also our non-indigenous foster carers who provide care for Indigenous and non-indigenous children.

'This initiative has been made possible by the wonderful work of the CQAICCA Placement Services Team.

'We encourage all our Indigenous foster care services throughout the country to adopt the same principle of the recruitment of non-indigenous foster carers.'

Contact: malcolm.gooda@cqaicca.org.au

**The SNAICC
e-Bulletin fortnightly
in your email**

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or send us your
news to include at**

www.snaicc.asn.au

A long story about SNAICC

A conversation between former SNAICC Chairperson Muriel Bamblett AM and former SNAICC EO Julian Pocock



Muriel Bamblett AM stood down as SNAICC Chairperson in November 2008 and Julian Pocock resigned as SNAICC Executive Officer in May 2009. *SNAICC News* recorded a conversation between Julian and Muriel about their ten year partnership leading SNAICC.

Muriel Bamblett is the EO of VACCA, the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Julian Pocock now works with Berry Street, Victoria. Much of this conversation refers to the AICCAS - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled child and family welfare services, such as VACCA and Yorganop.

SNAICC News doesn't usually run six page long stories, but this is such a special feature treat. So get a cup of tea, sit down and enjoy!

JP: SNAICC was formally set up in 1981. How did SNAICC manage to grow a bit under the Howard Government whilst other peak bodies did not flourish so well?

MB: There were a lot of people initially involved in SNAICC – the Isabelle Coes and all the wonderful people that fought the hard fight for rights. But we were a new generation more focused on concrete things that the government could do. Having come in with Liberal Government we were always in a conservative milieu. The ten years we were both there were the ten years of Howard.

We had lots of people giving us good advice like Morgan and Disney, who helped us do our strategic plan. We were always on the front foot, not just going to them with problems but with solutions. I think that was the difference with SNAICC. We were able to transition better than others when government said: 'You can't have advocacy.'

We came and met the people who mattered and engaged. We never gave up. The thing about being all new was that we had a lot of energy for speaking to people – Warren Truss, John Herron, Phillip Ruddock, Amanda Vanstone, Larry Anthony and Joselyn Newman and we realised that the advisors and the senior staff were critical.

I met Howard a few times and I can be a bit more softer on him now. He had very conservative people around him all the time. But having Larry Anthony as a Minister for Children was significant for us. He had good advisors and we had good relationships with them. It wasn't all one-way either – they came and sat with our National Executive. So we were on the front foot all the time and jumped in where we felt there was an opportunity. They were conservative, but we were there, giving them good advice. We worked on the federal budget and issue papers and turned up with presentations. In my ten years with

SNAICC I was probably the only person to survive every Children's Council. There was the National Child Protection Council first, and then it was ACAP. Every time a new Minister came on board they changed the name and appointed a different committee. Thankfully I was on every one, which showed that they really did have respect for SNAICC. Larry Anthony gave us a lot more profile than other Ministers. After me saying to him a few times: 'You fund us and you never mention us,' he went on record quite a few times to say that he speaks with SNAICC.

JP: I think it's been important for SNAICC to always work with all the political parties, to understand they all play a role in the policy debate and that we have got to influence everybody and not allow ourselves to be captured by anybody.

MB: When I started with SNAICC I had a conversation with NACCHO EO Steve Larkin (*Editor's note - not the current SNAICC Chair*). He said SNAICC needs to improve its profile and be known by government. He was saying if SNAICC was defunded tomorrow who would kick up a stink? That comment stayed in my head, that SNAICC had to build a profile, putting it in the thinking of senior bureaucrats and ministers. Alf Bamblett said to me then that SNAICC had no profile on the ground. We hadn't done newsletters for a long time, the

It's been important to always work with all the political parties and that we have got to influence everybody and not allow ourselves to be captured by anybody

basic things, so we didn't have a lot of support at the community level.

But at that time we were trying to save AICCA funding, as there was a view that the Commonwealth shouldn't be funding the AICCAS, child welfare and SNAICC. To have tipped all that on its head now and have the Commonwealth invest in SNAICC and have SNAICC mentioned in most speeches about children has been a huge achievement.

JP: A lot of the AICCAS really struggled and quite a few fell over.

MB: The AICCAS were formed in the 1970s, acting on rights and strong political advocacy for children. So it was hard to transition from being a voice to doing things on the ground. One of the things you and I focused on was trying to improve the personal relationships, but a lot of the AICCAS struggled with engaging the states. The Victorian government was social justice minded, but a lot of states are very racist and they don't believe in a separate service system. They never looked for the good in AICCAS and were quick to judge. Some Aboriginal people working in government worked against the AICCAS too, to get them defunded. It was sad to see Aboriginal people working against Aboriginal people. Some AICCAS were scape-goated when governments when weren't doing the right thing and our Aboriginal services coped the blame.

Child welfare departments generally thought self-determination meant setting up small Aboriginal child welfare organisations and then hand balling them all the Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. When those agencies couldn't manage all those children, couldn't keep an eye on where they were placed and when kids ended up sometimes in more trouble, then the AICCAS got blamed, and most AICCAS suffered from not knowing what they didn't know. They

didn't know the data. All they knew is that they were funded for a very small percentage of the children and expected to do a lot more than others.

I think the work of the AICCAS was really around fighting for the children's cultural heritage, but on top of that they were supposed to do the service delivery. Governments failed to recognise the complexity of keeping kids connected and protected, of building up families and keeping kids in their communities. This required workers to work with the whole family and that was a time when you weren't supposed to work with the family. You were mainly supposed to work with the child. Government really struggled with that.

Most of the AICCAS now are doing good work for the child protection system, but the original vision was to prevent kids going into the child protection system. That's still the challenge for most of the AICCAS, how to advocate for and protect all of the rights of children and not just child protection rights. Children have rights to be in families, to be supported to go to school. It's critical that AICCAS have the resources to work with families to prevent kids going into the system, and if they are in the system, to make sure that they are connected with their families and that we do no further cultural harm.

If we have learnt anything from Stolen Generations, it's that disconnection from culture is the biggest issue for Aboriginal children, and there are too many Aboriginal children in-out-of-home care that Aboriginal services don't manage. In Victoria there are 650 Aboriginal children in care, but Aboriginal services are funded to work with only 150 of them. So what is the role of the Aboriginal community and services for those other 500 children? We need to protect those children's right to their cultural connections, to push for compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. If we only focus on the small number we are doing a disservice to so many, but we still don't have all those systems in place.

JP: Maybe AICCAS could go back to SNAICC's original 1970s vision for some of that rights focus. Perhaps if AICCAS and

could operate with greater independence.

MB: Child welfare quarantines you to work with only a small percentage of children and to work very narrowly with children in the care system. They don't fund to make sure children's rights are complied with, or to work with all the stakeholders. The fact is that every state is different around the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and the courts have magistrates with no

don't want the AICCAS to grow that big and their role could be more about coordinating with those other services instead of trying to do everything themselves.

MB: Governments are looking at how we can all work together better, but funding has created divisions in the Aboriginal community between child and family welfare services and the early years services. It's a silo approach, when most of us actually work

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cultural training and no cultural standards who make cultural decisions about children. So SNAICC and the AICCAS still need to do a lot more advocacy, especially in some states, where there is a view that the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is placing children more at risk.

All of our SNAICC members demonstrate that self-determination does work and we've got to produce the research. Our evidence at VACCA is that when Aboriginal children in care are connected, our placements don't break down and our children are at school. We are getting better outcomes. Yorganop demonstrates that too, and our early years services.

JP: The movement to create SNAICC came from the 1979 Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar hosted by VACCA. There was lots of talk about whether SNAICC should focus exclusively on the child protection issues and agencies or include the early years kindies and childcare. The early years services were part of SNAICC at first, then they got excluded by an AGM and then they got back in for the last 10 or 12 years and are now a central part of SNAICC. I wonder if the debate was because an original vision was that AICCAS would do early years, family support work and parenting type support work, that their child and family welfare services would become so broad that child protection would just become a small slither of what they did. But I think the AICCA

together on the ground. Aboriginal child and family welfare services couldn't work without the Aboriginal early years sector. We send our children there, they take our kids and give them cultural grounding on such a daily basis. But the Commonwealth really struggled with the AICCAS because they couldn't really control them as they were statutory bodies driven by the states and territories and the Commonwealth couldn't make the statutory bodies amalgamate with the early years services.

In 1997 a lot of the MACS members came to the SNAICC Townsville conference and put forward their case to be full SNAICC members. I'd only just got onto the SNAICC so it was interesting to hear the discussions and see both sides of the argument. The AICCAS were concerned that the Commonwealth was only really interested in the early years and would use early childhood services as an excuse to move totally away from the AICCAS. Maybe a lot of us were not truly focused on what was on the best interest of children, and how we could we work together and we were all being very defensive. Over the years common sense prevailed and now we have the early years on board. I think we have developed a good policy framework for the AICCAS but I don't think that we have a good policy framework for the early years yet, or challenged the states enough.

JP: Part of the challenge is being a peak body focussed on children, as compared to a peak body like NACCHO which is focussed on a sector. If you focus on primary health care provision it is easier to quantify where things end and start, who are the organisations that do it and who are your members. Whereas when you focus on children and organisations that work with Aboriginal children, it's far broader and the organisations you work with are much broader.

If we have learnt anything from Stolen Generations, it's that disconnection from culture is the biggest issue for Aboriginal children – and there are too many Aboriginal children in-out-of-home care that Aboriginal services don't manage

other Aboriginal agencies in the child welfare area can be funded more from the Attorney General's department to do that advocacy and rights work and develop standards, rather than by welfare departments, then they

agencies became a bit captured by the child protection systems which fund them and they do that work well. At the same time an Aboriginal early years sector developed. So there may be an argument now that you

MB: Children are affected by the whole cycle - homelessness, justice housing, health, employment – and how does SNAICC get involved in all those areas? SNAICC has been brilliant in using the existing networks. The future challenge will be to strategically align where we want to go. We tend to focus on what we are doing well, and it is hard to do things like looking at human rights it when you have got so many priorities and things to do.

JP: SNAICC is still very poorly resourced, it's pathetic really. The Commonwealth core secretariat funding pays for one part-time policy worker, an executive officer and some administrative costs.

MB: It's the SNAICC Resource Service funding that keeps us afloat and has allowed us to build our profile. But I would go on record saying SNAICC's biggest asset has been you, Julian. I can say that and it cannot be deleted that from this interview. We have had very good executive officers. For people to work the hours on that money and deliver so much, to work so respectfully with us as Aboriginal people and as an executive. We've

The intervention wasn't our way of doing things and it was sad that we were so focussed on the NT that we let WA and NSW off the hook when there are a lot more children at risk in those states

had really good non-Aboriginal staff with commitment beyond what was asked of them. We've had a lot of Aboriginal staff pour their heart and soul into SNAICC and love the Executive. We are all family and we remember people fondly. The Linda Briskmans who contributed with her book about SNAICC, *The Black Grapevine*, all of the material that SNAICC produced over the years which are still on people's shelves and gets referred to all the time. We have seen amazing growth of people. Kenny Bedford did the first *Through Young Black Eyes*, an amazing product, and other people have taken it forward. We've had lots of good people work here and we many executive members go through. And you can't fault anyone on their passion and commitment. Most National Executive members turn up for every meeting, read their papers, know what's on and contribute to the conversations. SNAICC is as good and powerful as its executive, and it's an executive that doesn't bad mouth the organisation and stands strong. I think SNAICC always had positive support and respect from our membership.

JP: There must be some things we haven't done so well...

MB: I think that we put neglect on the agenda and we've been able to get the Commonwealth, and we've been on the Australian Families board, having those alliances and networks. But the NT intervention has been difficult – we pushed government to do more in the NT and we did the media work around trying to

SNAICC is as good and powerful as its executive, an executive that doesn't bad mouth the organisation and stands strong

get it changed but they haven't done what we advocated. We would have like to be more involved and we tried very hard. The intervention wasn't our way of doing things and it was also sad that we were so focussed at times on the NT that we let WA and NSW off the hook, and there are a lot more children at risk in those states. In the NT there are 280 are Aboriginal children in out-of-home-care, but in WA there are 1080 and in NSW there are 4300! But government focused only on the NT. So when you look at the sheer number of kids in NSW and Qld. You would have to say we need to do more. But our biggest failing is I'd love to have done a lot more work around getting racism addressed and how it impacts on children.

JP: There's been a big media reaction recently to a suggestion that child care centres may want an Aboriginal flag in their centres

MB: I believe we are still in a very racist time. Introducing culture takes nothing away from an early years centre. One of my most significant memories of SNAICC was being given a video from a MACS showing Aboriginal children on a Monday morning walking out with the Aboriginal flag, singing a song they had made up about how important the Aboriginal flag was to them. That centre was doing so much for their children saying: 'This is something we should be proud of.' I'm disappointed that some people see respecting Aboriginal culture as wrong for the early years services. It would worry me if we don't respond to these comments, even if we just write to

I was given a video from a MACS showing Aboriginal children on a Monday morning walking out with the Aboriginal flag, singing a song they had made up about how important the Aboriginal flag was to them

that person, or the papers, to do something to allay Australia's fears and respond to how important the Aboriginal flag is.

Our therapists at VACCA tell us kids

will draw the Aboriginal flag, it's what keeps them safe and makes them feel good, it's the Aboriginal flag. If kids are saying the Aboriginal flag is important to them, why wouldn't the early childhood centres and others see that as something children need, not as something adults are forcing on them. It's what children know makes them feel safe. If you have one little sticker on the wall and an Aboriginal child sees it, they know they

can go into that place and feel culturally safe. While it may seem symbolic, that Aboriginal flag really sticks out for miles, it means so much more than people realise.

JP: How do you think we went on the international stage?

MB: There were a couple of trips to the United Nations in Geneva. Going overseas highlighted for me that we were not as bad as other countries, where they talked about children entering slavery, pornography, prostitution and being trafficked opened up a different dimension for me. You can't represent children without really knowing what's actually happening for them and the magnitude of what we didn't know in Australia about children struck me. I first went to the UN in 1998 after the *Bringing Them Home Report* was launched in 1997. So they were really hungry to hear about it. But I landed there with nothing, So I rang you and you said 'no' to me.

JP: Which was the only time I ever said no. It was my third day on the job!

MB: And I'd been on the job about six months...and mine wasn't a job, I was volunteering, sent overseas with ... nothing! And I was asked to talk at a UN convention about the Stolen Generations. I felt really we let the Australian Government off the hook, when they gave a very bland report about all these wonderful things they were doing, when they had done nothing really. It was a great opportunity missed, we should have thought about it a lot more I hadn't prepared enough. But it was at the end of the year when we were all tired from the amount of work in our own organisations. I would have

like to have done a better presentation, and I do think we neglected United Nation and I do worry about what we do internationally.

JP: Certainly SNAICC can, and should,

do more with our Maori neighbours.

MB: A lot of the things they are doing are similar. Cindi Cairo, the NZ Children's Commissioner talked to the VACCA conference about the way elders were taking responsibility for children and standing up for them. There had been a child death in one community, which then turned against the media. The media and everybody else gave them such a hard time and the community then stood up and said: 'Yes, it happened, we own it, we did wrong and we are going to do something to make sure that no child ever dies in our community again.' The media didn't know what to do then, they were disempowered. A lot of Maori people were very proud of this one leader that stood up. Imagine what that would be like if we had the capacity to get Champions For Children, Elders speaking up.

When we went to Canada we stopped off at a family violence forum, it was so good to look at what they were doing, having a Step Back rap festival where young people were encouraged to write a rap song about stopping violence. They engaged families to sign up to end violence in the communities, to set an agreement. And you learn these things when you travel overseas and see what others are doing.

JP: In New Zealand a couple of people said to me that until they had that exposure to SNAICC their impression of Aboriginal people was that they didn't resist colonisation and were passive rather than assertive against colonisation, and that impression had changed. That's one of the reasons why it would be good for SNAICC to do a bit more international work.

MB: When we go overseas we need to have both men and women. to get the balance right in what they are hearing about men and children, and the good work SNAICC has done in getting the message about men and parenting. Hopefully with Steve as SNAICC Chair that will change. I don't use the words warriors or resistance fighters, but our men use those words and the Maori men I met were talking about warriors.

JP: That came up at the Family Action Centre conference last year (co-convened with SNAICC). A speaker from a Brisbane alcohol recovery program said men get so sick of hearing 'we were colonised and these fellows took our women and land and we did nothing about it.' So instead he relays stories 'this is where we had a fight and we took out 25 white fellas, and we did this and that.' He said it really changes men's self esteem.

MB: Richard Frankland has been working with our young people at VACCA, creating for them images of the resistance

fighters. He says: 'these are the people who fought for you, and are still fighting, because there's so much to be fought for'. Our communities continue to fighting for money for our organisations, but some young people think that is all about aggression and a lot of children see community fighting as lateral violence. There is a fear that children

I know more now, not because I've travelled, but because the Executive brings their knowledge to the meeting

will move away from community to avoid confrontation, to avoid being angry and being a victim. So there is a danger that we could lose children to culture.

JP: Another challenge we maybe haven't met so well is conversation in the child welfare and child protection that issues need to be understood through the lens of culture. I think sometimes the other lenses we don't look through are the lens of understanding the broader socio-economic environment that impacts on all children. At times we almost forget the levels of poverty and hardship that so many Aboriginal families confront. Poverty is still the strongest indicator of who will end up in child protection. We know that any child that grows up in poverty where no parent works is highly likely that they will end up unemployed, whether they are Aboriginal or not.

MB: I remember when you first started with SNAICC you did a paper on neglect. I think that's been the strength of Nigel and you, you both actually raised our awareness. We were so into our business, but you raised our awareness about neglect, family violence, family trauma, and institutionalisation. We have all taken a journey in SNAICC around growing to understand the broader issues that children do come into care because of health, unemployment and poverty. That information you gave us was aimed at telling the white people, but it actually informed us, because we didn't know. Aboriginal people don't often know their own data, don't read or access the research, so SNAICC taught us and trained us over the years. I didn't know

At times we almost forget the levels of poverty and hardship that so many Aboriginal families confront. Poverty is still the strongest indicator of who will end up in child protection

what the word 'institutionalisation' was the first time you gave me the piece of paper to do a media interview. I knew what that word was, but it was such a big word, and there were many of those. Now they are part of my everyday language. Understanding it, naming it, has been really important for all

of us, it has been such a learning journey. I know more now, not because I've travelled, but because the Executive brings their knowledge to the meetings and SNAICC shares that with the papers it presents to the Commonwealth. That knowledge is power. So it makes you stronger advocates when you know the data and can ask the questions. Now I know that 33% of kids come into care because of family violence, so now I talk to the family violence people about these children.

Prior to being on SNAICC I didn't know how to ask for the data or analyse it, or what questions to ask. It's been a massive learning curve and I have been very fortunate to be CEO of VACCA and have SNAICC as a resource to learn from. When we met Minister Ruddock, he wanted to know all the evidence and reports, and we were able to give him a really comprehensive report. He was dumbfounded that an Aboriginal organisation actually had the data, the evidence.

JP: Eight of us sat there at the meeting and he just sat at his desk and didn't looked up, just sat there looking at his brief.

MB: He was really trying to unnerve us. He was talking to Connie and using these great big words and she didn't stop, she just kept talking.

JP: Did you enjoy working with any of the bureaucrats?

MB: There were a couple I thought were very challenging, gave good advice, we had honest conversations with and told us the lay of the land. They were the ones that I really enjoyed. There were some really good, passionate people, Melinda Tynan helped us get the resource service, Jeremy Knott ... I remember all the arguments you both had and I'd sit there and be thinking 'Do I need to separate these two?' But he never personalised it. I think we were in the right place, in the right time, during the right era. People may say we could have done more, but we were able to enjoy good relationships with a lot of bureaucrats and advisors.

JP: I don't think this government or the previous one have the right bureaucratic structure to work well with Aboriginal

communities. The Indigenous Coordination Centres network doesn't appear to be achieving anything really. We had a small agency ring recently from WA, a good agency in child and family support, who were desperate to get some training in early years for their Aboriginal staff, a major

priority area for the government. There is money in DEEWR to fund these activities but for ten months they struggled to get anybody to support them to get funding. These Indigenous Coordination Centres appear to play absolutely no role in helping small agencies access the mainstream dollars and support them to achieve their goals. They have lost the understanding of how to do good long term community development and they don't have the structures in government or the policy tools.

MB: Once you could write to the Minister and get a response, but not now.

JP: You went to the consultations on the national Indigenous representative body in Adelaide, what are your thoughts on that?

MB: I am quietly optimistic with Tom Calma. I think we have to have confidence in someone to lead it and I just personally have reservations about how those final people will be chosen. Everyone is nervous about that. But they are looking at an interim body and with a peak forum that they will consult. I did speak about resources for the peaks, but they say they already fund peaks to provide that. There was a view the peaks wanted that forum. I said the peaks don't want that forum because then this forum will think it can do service delivery and it can tell the service system what to do. One fellow wanted the forum to get involved in service delivery, but I said it's for policy, to inform budget, to get feedback and understand the issues, the priorities, the challenges for the service system, and not to have to go begging cap in hand like we did with the previous National Indigenous Council. They were exclusive, not inclusive. The issue around the issue of who and what are they representing, of what is representative, there were many questions.

JP: And the national Apology?

MB: The actual Apology was absolutely brilliant. There's no way anybody could describe what that felt like. It was a bit sad that SNAICC didn't get the recognition though. There's a view that it was Mick Dodson that got it, when a lot of that work that got the enquiry up was by SNAICC, but at no stage does anybody mention SNAICC. But you know Brian Butler and Nigel de Souza had an instrumental role, even when the enquiry was handed down. But the Apology was significant, a really important time, and I think the Prime Minister showed leadership. I think we have to nail him a little bit harder about what he said in his apology.

JP: I read it again recently and it's a terrific speech. Prime Minister Rudd focused on sheeting home responsibility for what happened to parliaments. Parliaments

made these laws and that's why it's right for the Federal Parliament to take responsibility and apologise. It countered the other view that these policies were just benign practices that other people, churches and welfare administrators were responsible for. He made the point that the policies were racially based and that Parliaments were responsible for racially discriminatory practices. At the same time they still haven't done anything about the racially discriminatory elements of the NT Intervention and suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act. There's this contradiction between his words and sentiments in the national policy and their most high profile policy prescription for Aboriginal people.

MB: Clinton Wanganeen from SA gave a presentation to the leadership forum this March about having Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioners in each state and territory with a mandate to look at government policies that hadn't been enacted for Aboriginal people. He cited an example where a government had committed a ten year funding process to an Aboriginal organisation ceased funding after two years. He took that written commitment back to the government and said: 'You are in breach of your own pledge' and so they kept their funding. Even though we have an Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner is it only policy? They don't have any real teeth. I think we as Aboriginal people have to be much more astute about our own legislation. We fight in the budget time and then we don't check to see that they have actually delivered on it. A recent example in Victoria was we got last years almost \$450,000 for therapeutic residential care. They didn't fully deliver on it, and we had never asked them how they were going to spend it or when were they going to roll it out. We have worked out that we have to actually chase up that funding and be more astute on keeping an eye on what's promised and implemented.

Because at a Commonwealth level a lot of Aboriginal monies go back every year unexpended. Once upon a time they

would let you keep that for infrastructure or services for the next year. Now they take all that money back and it's working out to be millions of dollars. Some of Aboriginal communities don't even know that government's got the funds. There has to be a better system to ensure program dollars are delivered.

SNAICC has raised my level of awareness of knowing what you don't know, and how to find out what you don't know and what you should know ...there's so much you have to keep your eye on. We need to make sure that our members get really vigilant about how

We used to stay in the very cheap motels, they were funny times. I remember one of our chunkier executives saying 'Muriel, come and see my shower, I can't fit through the door'

their states are rolling out their money.

JP: It could be a role for a new national representative body, that they have that monitoring and accountability role, because SNAICC will never have the resources to monitor it all and we don't have SNAICC versions at a state and territory level. Governments often have a broad bucket of funding for something and a specific allocation for the Aboriginal version. They start on the mainstream version first and leave the implementation of the Aboriginal program until later because they think it's harder and then they leave themselves less time which does make it harder.

JP: Will you miss any favourite hotels?

MB: Once the airline got you and I stranded in Adelaide. So we ended up staying in a very luxurious hotel – double king sized beds. So elegant. But we got there at 1am were on a 6am flight out, so we were only there for four hours. I have to remember all the bad motels as well, when we used to stay in the very cheap motels, they were funny times. I remember one of our chunkier executives saying 'Muriel, come and see my shower, I can't fit through the door'... there was lots of fun and laughing. We had sad times too. We lost Peter Haroa and I still miss him, the big man with that fast car.

There was Dale McLeod was such a strong advocate, Raylene Oui and Margaret Ah Kee. Really good people with good

There's more that you don't know than you do know, and if you are patient and persist, the knowledge and wisdom will find its way to you - you don't have to rush to look for it

hearts. Harold Furber from Alice Springs, and Rosie Baird, from Darwin – she was very committed to SNAICC and came very year, then we had Natalie Hunter, and Brian Butler, who could forget him! He loved SNAICC with a passion, loved the fact he could see he was making a difference. Nigel de Souza, Sharon Slater – all those people

who contributed to SNAICC in the early days. SNAICC had been going 15 years when I started, so I didn't know the Eric Kyles, Lionel and Alf Bamblett when they were really advocating at the earliest stages – standing up and fighting. I would have loved to have been in the room with them.

Certainly we have had very robust discussions over the years. But we had some fun too, we all got tricked or something happened. My funniest memory is probably when Minister Philip Ruddock spoke at the Parliament House launch of *Through Young Black Eyes* – the Executive members had stayed up very late the night before. They all looked very green with their sunglasses on.

JP: What about a national policy approach for children in the child welfare area and income management being imposed across all communities?

'You fund them peanuts and you want them to do everything.' These inequities make you really angry

MB: There is always a frustration when there are people who speak the language government wants to hear. SNAICC has to try and work out how they engage those people. I know you encouraged me a number of times to sit down and talk with Noel Pearson. Perhaps that's something in the future that can happen, to engage the people who have got the media rather than let them let them be heard as THE voice. At least send them our papers, have them aware of our view. They can then speak for or against it, but they still know our position. Noel will always be an individual and fight popular opinion, and the media will always try to sensationalise it, and we will always struggle with getting the attention of ministers if it's not a quick fix.

A lot of the things that we deal with are systemic, with years of history and neglect and short quick fixes for a small part of the community aren't applicable to a lot of communities. So governments will blame Aboriginal people rather than the model geared to a small percentage of people. People may think that what is in Cape York is making a lot of difference to a lot of



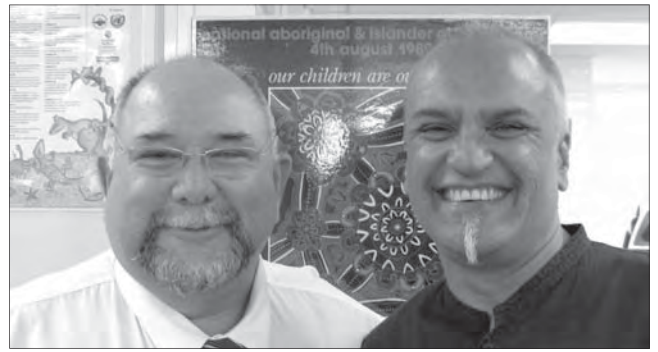
people, but you have a look at the evidence. The danger is when many communities are doing well, but one community has a bigger voice.

What SNAICC needs to do is empower a lot of communities to do the same talk, to say we are doing really good here, to get that advocacy, and we need to celebrate the people who do get that happening. I've seen it many times, like Alison Overem in Tasmania getting a voice, getting early childhood up and getting that new centre at Risdene Cove. SNAICC also contributed to VACCA's growth, and in South Australia too. How do you think I know as much as what I know about child welfare? I've taken a lot of things you do and copy cat them in my own organisation. To mimic from our national body and apply it to our own organisation is good for community. I have also appreciated SNAICC's capacity to come into a state when asked, help out and advocate when things go bad. Some states have been reluctant to take that up option but when asked we have done that, with a flexibility that has been excellent. I think SNAICC was responsible for saving the Queensland AICCAS and I don't care what others say. You came up with a quick \$90M model, a quick mud map that became the blue print for those AICCAS. I don't think anybody would give you the credit for that; everybody was putting their hand up to say that they did it.

JP: It wasn't just me; it was the AICCA services that were there. We had a weekend and a small window of opportunity to get something on the agenda. But I think you are certainly right that if it wasn't for SNAICC's intervention some years ago the Queensland government would have closed down the rest of the AICCAS.

MB: It was the state and the federal governments. The Commonwealth were red hot to get rid of the AICCAS and we were fighting those state government people who believed AICCAS were useless and not delivering. So it was a really big argument to say: 'You fund them peanuts and you

want them to do everything.' These inequities make you really angry. Like when the Darwin AICCA, Karu, tells you they were getting Commonwealth funding but the Territory



The new SNAICC team – Chair Steve Larkins (left) and EO Frank Hytten (right)

Government was pulling the strings about what they should be doing, and contributing a mere \$130,000. A pathetic little bucket of money. I didn't realise until recently there was an agreement the Commonwealth was responsible for Aboriginal people in the NT and ACT. How does that work? It was remiss of me not to know that for ten years.

JP: Any advice for incoming SNAICC Chair Stephen Larkins?

MB: He's got to take small steps, and he's got to make it his. I think SNAICC is in very good hands. I think incoming SNAICC EO Frank Hytten and Steve will make a perfect

He has all the qualities you would want in a SNAICC Chair, he's kind, with a great heart and a passion, he's very professional and knows the business well

couple. Do you have any advice for Frank?

JP: Yes, just persist. There's more that you don't know than you do know, and if you are patient and persist the knowledge and the wisdom will find its way to you – you don't have to rush to look for it.

MB: My only advice to Steve would be to ensure SNAICC is both respected and respectful. You can argue and disagree, but it's all about respect. Once government wouldn't meet with us because we would attack them, but now we are much more constructive. So I hope SNAICC continues to have both respectful and robust engagement. They need to be prepared to guide this government at the moment. I think they need a lot of direction, and SNAICC is in perfect position to provide that guidance. I reckon that would be your challenge Julian. Isn't it ironic! We were there all those bloody years with all those conservatives, and now we get a Labor government and we're gone.

JP: There's other places we can do things...

Transcribed and edited by Rosie Elliott
Graphic © Astri Baker: astribaker@yahoo.com.au

5 tips for developing organisational policies & procedures

What are policies?

A **policy** is a written document that talks about the rules or principles the organisation sticks to. It is the 'what and why'. For example: A smoking policy might say 'our organisation is a smoke-free workplace' and explain why that is important for staff and client health.

What are procedures?

A **procedure** is a set of instructions for how to stick by these rules or principles. It is the 'how'. For example, a the smoking procedure might explain that 'staff can only smoke outside the front gate' and 'all staff will be given training to help them quit if they want to'. [i]

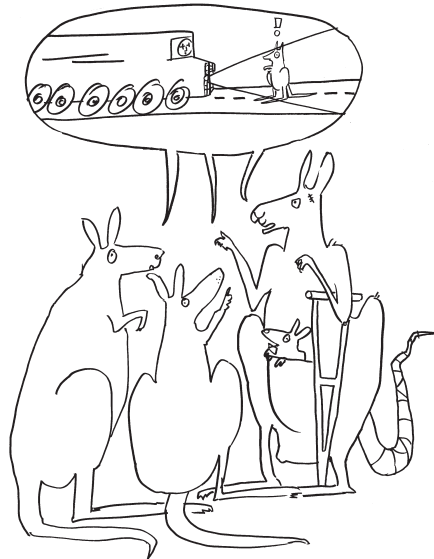
SNAICC's top five tips to get you started:

1. Understand why the policy or procedure is relevant
2. Be realistic!
3. Don't re-invent the wheel
4. Involve others
5. Don't let it sit on the shelf

1 Understand why the policy or procedure is relevant

Sometimes you need a new policy because someone outside the service asks you for it (eg. your funding body) and sometimes something happens in your service (eg. a client complaint or a staff injury) which means you decide you need a policy or procedure to help you solve a problem or prevent it happening again.

Start by asking yourself: **What is the problem we are trying to solve?**



A good policy should be designed to help solve this problem, make your life easier and benefit your clients and community in the long run.

Some benefits to a good policy or procedure may include: [ii]

- Workers are clear about what is expected of them
- Better decision-making is in place, so people don't have to keep on discussing and re-discussing the same issues every time they come up
- Better accountability and quality

assurance, helping meet accreditation standards and build a good image as a professional service.

- Fewer risks (eg. legal risks, risks of complaints)
- Saving you money through better efficiency

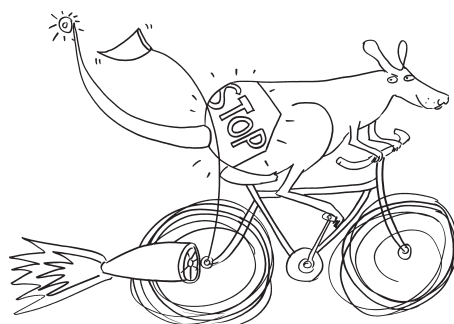
Another important step in developing a policy or procedure will be to get a good idea of how it is relevant to your organisation's principles or other policies, procedures and ways of working. Good policies and procedures should adhere to the service's philosophy and purpose, reflect the needs and wishes of the community, be consistent with legislative requirements and have maximum benefit to your client group. [iii]

2 Be realistic!

It is important that your policies and procedures are practical and realistic. For example, if you develop a policy that states that two people have to be in a vehicle any time you transport a client, can your staff roster handle this? Do your procedures say what a staff member should do if they are the only one around when an urgent transport is needed? In this case, should they say 'no' to the client, or could your policy suggest some other steps they could take to solve the problem?

Some other questions to think about early on are:

- Will it be useful?
- Is it client focused – will it help improve your service delivery?
- Will there be any cost to implementing your policy? eg. new equipment, or more staff?
- Will it impact differently on some staff or clients than others?



- Will any job roles need to change to implement this new policy or procedure?

3 Don't re-invent the wheel

Almost every policy has been written before by someone somewhere, and you can usually get ideas, templates, checklists or even whole sample manuals to help you get started. Many of these tools are free.

That's why SNAICC has put a lot of examples or links to example on our website Clearinghouse at www.snaicc.asn.au/srs/resourcing (or go to our homepage www.snaicc.asn.au and click on the 'Support and Management' button). Have a look and see what you can find. If you can't find something that helps, give us a call.

Some excellent free resources we have links to on our Clearinghouse include:

- *Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) Administration Manual* (www.amsantmanual.com)
- Community Builders (communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au)
- NCOSS Management Support Unit (www.ncoss.org.au/msu)
- Our Community Policy Bank (www.ourcommunity.com.au/policybank)
- Paul Bullen's Management Alternatives for Community Services (www.mapl.com.au)
- VCOSS Training and Development Clearinghouse Resources (www.vcss.org.au/clearinghouse/resources)

As well as these free resources, there are also many inexpensive resources listed on our Clearinghouse, with links to how to order them. There is also a list of some relevant training providers on our website.

4 Involve others

Policies and procedures only really work if you involve others in the development and implementation. If you start from a template don't just cut and paste and call it 'done!' Instead, talk it over and make changes together with others until you have a version you are happy with.

Think about how you might use staff meetings, team planning days, board



meetings or client and community consultations to help make your policy better. For example:

- Involve staff and colleagues. If staff who will have to follow a new policy or procedure are involved in writing it, it is more likely to be a good policy or procedure, and they are more likely to follow it, too.
- Involve the senior management or board. It is important to have the policy endorsed or signed off by the boss or the board if you are to have their support and backing when it is implemented. It is best to involve them early on in the planning so they fully support you when it's done.
- Involve clients and community. If your policy might have an impact on client services, make sure you involve or consult clients and/or community members along the way to gather their ideas and feedback, and explain how it might impact on them.

5 Don't let it sit on the shelf

Once you've done this work, don't just let your policy or procedure sit on the shelf. If you've involved others in the development of your policy or procedure, this will be easier to achieve.

Some things to think about are: [ii]

- How will you tell people (staff, clients, community) about the new policy or

procedure and their obligations?

- Will there need to be any training on how to follow the procedures?
- Who will be responsible for making sure it is followed?
- What will be the consequences if the policy or procedure is NOT followed?

It is a good idea to build in a review date when you implement the first version. It is rare to get a policy or procedure absolutely right the first time around, and this is OK. Through reviewing it with your colleagues, you will have a second (or third) chance to improve it, and the discussion will also help remind people about it and make sure it keeps being followed.

If you are stuck - ask for help

As well as producing resources and publications, the SNAICC Resource Service aims to share information and providing program support which helps develop services' capacity to better respond to the needs of children and families. This means helping you in the area of governance, management and capacity. We share this information through:

SNAICC's online information

On our website (www.snaicc.asn.au) SNAICC has links to a wide range of resources relating to governance, management and capacity. There are also links to training providers in each state and territory, and several policy templates you can download from our Clearinghouse. Our list of links and resources also provides some resources in relation to cultural awareness and cultural competency for mainstream organisations.

To find these resources, go to the SNAICC home page www.snaicc.asn.au and click on the 'Support and Management' button on the right hand side of the home page, or visit: <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/resourcing/default.cfm?loadref=193>

SNAICC's email updates

Our fortnightly e-bulletin to subscribers regularly features key news items relating to government and SNAICC policy initiatives, new resources from the SNAICC

Resource Service, and highlights and new additions to our Clearinghouse relating to governance, management and policy. To sign up, visit our website (www.snaicc.asn.au) and click on the 'E-bulletin' button on the right.

Call us!

If you have questions or need advice in relation to governance, management or capacity, please give Catriona at SNAICC a ring. We can probably help you find the information you need.

SNAICC News

From time to time, we will have a feature in SNAICC News on a particular policy or procedure issue. In this issue, we've started from scratch with these few tips for new managers or those new to writing policies and procedures. If you have an issue you'd like to see us go into in more depth in future editions, contact Catriona.

Can you help?

If you have a sample policy or procedure you'd like to share with other SNAICC members and subscriber, we can put that on our Clearinghouse, too. Let us know!

References:

[i] Adapted from: Writing Policy and Procedure Manuals, Policies and Procedures: A Guide for Community Management Groups, VCOSS 2007.

[ii] Adapted from: Writing Policy and Procedure Manuals, Paul Bullen Management Alternatives and Policies and Procedures: A Guide for Community Management Groups, VCOSS 2007. See: www.mapl.com.au/policy/tp1.htm www.vcss.org.au/clearinghouse/resources/resource-%20vcss%20manuals.htm or visit the SNAICC Clearinghouse.

[iii] Adapted from: About the Manual: AMSANT Administration Manual, AMSANT (2009). See <http://www.amsantmanual.com/01introduction.html#i03> or visit the SNAICC Clearinghouse.

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The SNAICC clearinghouse - www.snaicc.asn.au

A storehouse of resources for our child and family services from across the nation



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

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Of course, our work is only as strong as our combined membership. We need both your financial support and active participation as members, associate members or subscribers to be effective advocates, communicators and resource developers.

And everyone and every organisation can participate, whether as a full voting member or as an affiliate member or as a subscriber. Full members receive all SNAICC publications may vote at the AGM and nominate and vote for the National Executive. Affiliate and Associate members may not vote or nominate for the National Executive. (see details www.snaicc.asn.au)

SNAICC also welcomes all organisations, government departments or individuals to join as **subscribers**. Subscribers receive SNAICC News, National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day material and relevant SNAICC publications.

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SNAICC NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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FOR OUR CHILDREN Local Strengths,
National Challenges

AMPE ANWERNEKENHEKE

Rlterre Akwete
Aneye



Photo Catriona Elek: Todd River Alice Springs

Call for movies for the 2010 SNAICC national conference

We are seeking short digital stories, animations and other motion picture productions made by our children, from your schools, from digital stories projects... from anywhere you know we should look.

The movies will be screened throughout our national conference and be a celebration of and the voice of children and young people.

Please advise us as soon as possible if you are thinking of presenting a movie. However, as we encourage schools to participate, we will accept submissions until late May 2010.

To submit a movie, contact:
tatiana@snaicc.asn.au