

SNAICC Policy Statement

Principles for justice in child well-being and protection

Features of an effective child well-being and protection system

SNAICC believes that an effective child well-being and protection system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia is one in which the following features are present:

- a. Children's rights and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the core drivers of legislation, policy, program and practice.
- b. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle is rigorously implemented and monitored
- c. Families are recognised as the most important and sustainable support system for raising children.
- d. Primary, secondary and tertiary support services* are available to support families to raise their children and ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe and connected to family community and culture.
- e. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based agencies are the supported and trusted by governments to identify and respond to the needs within their communities.
- f. Communities and governments state clearly why they value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their place within Australia.
- g. Principles which underpin child welfare and protection have been formally agreed with SNAICC and adopted by all states and territories at Ministerial level.

** see attachment a for a full description of primary, secondary and tertiary support services*

Guiding principles for children's well being and protection

The following guiding principles should underpin our efforts to build an effective and integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child wellbeing and protection system in Australia.

1. Recognition of the ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families of policy and practices in previous generations that separated children from their families and families from their lands and country
2. Acceptance that trust and honest dialogue between governments and communities and a shared commitment to finding solutions is an essential starting point to building an effective and integrated child and family wellbeing system
3. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, cultures, diversity and the importance of family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as a central tenet of service provision
4. Recognition of the need to build family capacity and responsibility as the most important life long support system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
5. Recognition that family is the foundation of the social, cultural and emotional infrastructure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development.
6. Adherence to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.
7. Recognition of the value of family and community based decision making with regard to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
8. Commitment to re-building the capability and available resource base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families across generations to raise strong, healthy, happy children.
9. Commitment to informed and meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement in the design, development and delivery of services in the child protection and well-being sector.
10. Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to child rearing and family centred strengths based practice.
11. Understanding that non-Indigenous services should not compete with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services but work with them to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and families with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services having a recognised leadership role.
12. Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are each unique with their own histories, cultures, circumstances, needs and capabilities meaning that program design and delivery needs to be flexible so that resources are used most effectively at the community level.
13. The greatest proportion of government funding and other resources should be directed to the highest areas of need and recognise the over representation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system. Targets to reduce the level of over representation should be set, monitored and regularly reported against.

Attachment A. The Role of Primary Secondary and Tertiary Services

Primary Services are universal services. They are offered to everyone. Primary services include antenatal services, maternal and child health services, and preschool and childcare. The goal of primary services is to provide support and education for children and families before problems arise. In many cases, primary services help to prevent abuse and neglect occurring.

Secondary Services offer programs that identify and reduce the personal and social stresses on parents that lead to family breakdown and/or child abuse. Secondary services are targeted at individuals and families that need additional support or are working to overcome significant problems. Services include in-home family support, financial or family counselling, respite care and various parenting and self-help groups.

Tertiary Services include statutory services for children who have been at risk of significant harm where intervention is needed to ensure the ongoing safety of the child. These services include the statutory Child Protection Services and Placement Services for children who are unable to live at home. Tertiary services include foster care, kinship care and other out-of-home care.

For cultural and spiritual reasons, maintaining contact or involvement with family or returning to family will always be in the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child's best interests if safety issues can be addressed. Therefore, child welfare departments must work within the tertiary system and focus on the needs of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in foster care, but ideally should also organise secondary services to strengthen and support the child's family of origin after the child has been removed so that the child can maintain connection to their family and hopefully be reunited with them.

The provision of these services through an integrated model or as a continuum, ideally by holistic Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community-based providers, can have significant advantages and is SNAICC's preferred model. Families are less likely to experience service gaps and the outcomes of primary, secondary and tertiary services can be mutually reinforcing. Community-based tertiary services which are integrated with primary and secondary services have enhanced capacity to work with statutory child protection, provide quality information on appropriate interventions and placement options should child removal be under consideration and support families after the removal of children.

If we are to work in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and enable them to develop, maintain and strengthen their links to family, community and culture throughout their lives we must work towards incorporating good practices into the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Some examples of good practices within each of the sectors are as follows:

Primary

- Providing child care, preschool and primary and secondary education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children that is developmentally and culturally appropriate and enables physical, emotional, intellectual and cultural development.
- Providing opportunities for spiritual learning and development as part of curricula. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child who has the opportunity to allow their spirituality to develop and emerge during childhood has a sense of strength, confidence, pride, belonging, peace and security that has the potential to guide and protect them through adolescence and adulthood.

Secondary:

- Providing substance abuse, healing and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to prevent child abuse, neglect and removal and to enable removed children to be returned home.

- Providing assistance with parenting skills. Many Aboriginal parents have had no role models of good parenting due to they, or their parents, being brought up in institutions as members of the Stolen Generations and sometimes subject to severe abuse and maltreatment at the hands of their carers.

Tertiary:

- Proper implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle at all times focusing efforts to minimise child removals recognising that the principle states that child removal should be a last resort.

Where child removal is necessary;

- developing a detailed profile of the child with details such as his or her extended family, health, education and language group based on information from relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community based agencies;
- working systematically through the hierarchy of placement options under the Principle to find an appropriate carer;
- making serious and sustained efforts to place the child according to the first placement option under the Principle, that is, with a member of the child's extended family or kinship group; and
- detailed monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Principle so that difficulties with compliance can be quickly identified and responded to.

The Principle was designed to ensure that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children that needed to be removed from home remain connected to their family, community and culture to the maximum extent possible, but compliance with the Principle is very poor in most states and territories.

- Adequately resourced recruitment, training and support for foster carers to ensure we provide all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care with community belonging and involvement, stability, security and cultural and spiritual development as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.
- Out of home care service delivery and case management by agencies that have a good knowledge of the complex and fluid networks of families within communities that is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, and government support to facilitate the growth and development of these agencies and to make the best use of their current capacity.