

SNAICC NEWS

Our children need the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle more than ever!

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP) is the most important and most misunderstood and under-resourced aspect of child protection practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

This edition of SNAICC News focuses on the ATSICPP with articles on:

- The national policy context and SNAICC's influence on the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children;
- An introduction to the Principle;
- The importance of cultural care plans based on Terri Libesman's new report Cultural care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care;
- An interview with Graham Atkinson, an Aboriginal social worker, who was a key driver in developing the Principle in the late 1970s/early 1980s;
- An interview with Dana Clarke, EO of the Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Co-op, Out of Home Care and Family Support Service and Chair of AbSec NSW.

The battle to prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being taken away from their families is far from over. From 30 June 2009 to 30 June 2010, 11,468 of our children were in out of home care – an increase of almost 1000 children (9%) since 30 June 2009.



NT child welfare sector reform: ongoing challenges

Nov 2010: Natalie Hunter, former SNAICC NT Executive member, shows the SNAICC Executive a painting by Jenny Hart donated to the newly formed working party of a NT Aboriginal children, youth and family peak body.

Natalie spoke about her work as director of the former Darwin AICCA Karu and the need to create an NT-wide peak body for our children, youth and families. She thanked her current employer Life Without Barriers, for enabling her to be the interim Chair of the NT Peak Body; and thanked the SNAICC Executive for allowing CEO Frank Hytten to work with the NT stakeholders.

Natalie said that the painting reflects Jenny Hart's sixty years of life experiences and the importance of a new peak body to assist Aboriginal families and children in care. This painting is about foster carers, about all the feet moving together, with all the carers around the outside, the family intervention circle, and the layers of the family keeping them connected to their family, community and culture. Jenny has links to the Kimberley/Halls Creek region, lives in Darwin and was part of the Stolen Generation at Garden Point

See page 4 for more on these NT developments.

IN THIS ISSUE

SNAICC CEO report	2	OOHC National Standards	10
The policy context	3	Child Protection Australia 2009–10	11
NT Child welfare sector reform	4	Interview with Dana Clarke	12
The NT Intervention	4	Early childhood services audit	14
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle	5	SNAICC 2010 AGM	16
Cultural care in out-of-home care	6	QLD child protection change	18
Interview with Graham Atkinson	8	NSW – Healing Our Way	20
Keeping connected with culture	9	Early childhood stories	21
		Autism workshops	22
		SNAICC resources	23
		Calling all kids!	24



CEO report

I hope everyone had a restful break and returned to 2011 full of energy and optimism. At SNAICC this is certainly so, with the finalisation of our Strategic Plan (2011–2016) and the Secretariat work plan for 2011.

While some of our services were affected by the recent extreme weather, most are able to continue with minimum disruption. Please let me know if there is anything SNAICC can do to assist if your service was affected.

The core perennial issues will remain on our radar for 2011 – the effective application of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, support for the MACS, the development of the CFCs, the Government's commitments to 'Close the Gap', work in regard to the reform of the Child Welfare system in the NT and the broader issue in regard to children's rights. Work on the 3A (Abecedarian Approach to Early Years Learning) has stalled as the government reallocates resources to deal with the floods, but we are hopeful that the delay won't last forever.

We are also working on securing both our core and project based funding for the next two years across a range of work areas – the SNAICC Secretariat core and Resource Service, social and emotional wellbeing, the healing project (with the potential of partnering with the Healing Foundation), and in the early years area.

2011 also continues with a lot of potential through SNAICC partnerships with Family Relationships Services Australia (FRSA), Families Australia, NAPCAN, the Parenting Resource Centre (PRC), Australian Psychological Society (APS), Early Childhood Australia (ECA), Red Cross, Oxfam and others. Most of these come with expertise, resources and support. Our Resource Service will continue to consult on what resources are needed, should contain and be presented.

We aim to consolidate our training initiatives into a 'work area' within SNAICC; likewise in regard to research. As the opportunities come up we will focus on employing staff with specific knowledge in the early years and child welfare – given that they have expertise in the areas for which they are employed. Our internal accountability mechanisms will continue to be refined to meet the standards required, while constantly trying to minimise the bureaucratic demands that usually come with them.

The big news is that SNAICC has been granted Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, meaning that SNAICC can now receive tax-deductible donations. We are now planning as to how best to maximise this opportunity and will keep everyone posted. SNAICC thanks Arnold Bloch Leibler Lawyers for their work and expertise in assisting SNAICC in these matters.

2011 will be another big year for SNAICC. I look forward to the challenges ahead and to hearing from many of you and/or meeting in person.

Frank Hytten
Contact: frank@snaicc.asn.au

Love the kangaroos!

Thanks to SNAICC's graphic designer Nina Kelabora for her great kangaroo line drawings in this edition. Contact us if you wish to use them.

Floods, cyclones and your service

SNAICC is currently assessing the extent the recent floods and cyclone have affected all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services in Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

SNAICC wants to collect your flood stories so that we can keep the well being and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at the forefront of state and federal government budget allocations. The impact and trauma to our children and families with the loss of houses, belongings, possibly loss of family, service closures and damage to infrastructure can increase stress within families already under pressure. Please tell us your stories.
Contact: catrin@snaicc.asn.au

SNAICC a National Congress member

SNAICC is pleased to report that our application for membership to the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has been accepted. The National Board of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has assessed SNAICC as a member of Chamber One.

SNAICC website – we've upgraded!

We are proud to announce the upgrade of our new website. This is an exciting time for us and we hope that you find the new website resource that you keep coming back to.

The new site, created once again by Fraynetwork Multi-media has brought us in line with the latest in online web solutions, giving us much greater power over management and content authoring. We have key policy landing pages now that organise content around SNAICC's priorities. We also have Twitter and Facebook linked from this site.

Be patient with us as we build this site up and pull the content from the old site into the new order. The SNAICC website is very large and we hope to keep it growing. We have many resources on the site and aim to make the site one of our best resources itself. Please stay tuned and give us your feedback!

A special thanks again to Steve Darmody and Anne Walsh and Fraynetwork for going out of their way to get our site on to its legs.

It's www.snaicc.asn.au

Contact: tatiana@snaicc.asn.au

SUBSCRIBE NOW to the SNAICC newsletter & resources

4 August 2011

National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day

Calling creative kids!

Create artwork around the theme

"From small to big: growing stronger every day"

Submissions now open. Closing date 29 April.

The policy context.... (For details see articles in this issue)

National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children

Child protection was given a national focus for the first time in 2009 with the release of the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children. SNAICC was influential in advocating for the inclusion of Outcome 5 – Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities. Strategies under Outcome 5 commit governments to:

- Expand access to Indigenous and mainstream services for families and children
- Promote the development of safe and strong Indigenous communities
- Ensure Indigenous children receive culturally appropriate protection services and care

SNAICC has a strong role on the National Framework Implementation Working Group (NFIWG), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Framework. NFIWG includes representatives of FAHCSIA, states and territories and the Coalition of Organisations Concerned for the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children (including SNAICC). There has been some progress since the Framework was announced in 2009 but mainly focused on activities such as:

- The establishment of the Children and Family Centres, with varying levels of community involvement
- Determining sites for Indigenous Parenting Support Services; and
- A priorities setting workshop at the 2009 SNAICC/ Family Action Centre conference in Newcastle in 2009.

National Standards for Out of Home Care

SNAICC has advocated for national standards and legislation in child welfare since its 1981 SNAICC Conference Statement of Purpose. We are pleased that progress is starting to be made under the National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children

SNAICC influenced the development of the National Standards for Out of Home Care, which were released Dec. 2010. SNAICC advocated strongly for the wording of the Standards 3 that deals with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an active role in decision-making.

The full text of the standard is: Standard 3: 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people.'

This means that jurisdictions are responsible for ensuring active participation in decision-making, not just consultation. SNAICC will continue to work with the Commonwealth and states and territories to develop consistent accountability mechanisms, definitions and practices around the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

2011 priorities: Closing the Gap

In 2011 the Closing the Gap element of the Framework will focus on the development of an Indigenous Children's Priorities Plan. The SNAICC National Executive met with FAHCSIA's representatives at the March National Executive meeting to discuss the proposed Plan.

FaHCSIA told the National Executive that a draft Plan would be presented

to Community Services and Disability Ministers in August 2011 and would provide examples of an evidence base of good practice from governments, the non-government sector and communities.

The National Executive raised a number of issues of concern, which FAHCSIA undertook to consider in developing the Plan.

These concerns included the need for a credible Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to have long-term engagement with community and to be built on a strong, well-resourced community controlled service sector.

The Plan should outline current and projected need, especially in areas that impact on child protection (family violence, housing, education, employment etc) as well as a realistic assessment of the Close the Gap progress and its impact on child protection outcomes.

Further, SNAICC is concerned that the language of the final Plan be strengths-based and not problematise our children, families and communities.

SNAICC's child protection wish list

- An immediate and sustained reduction in child protection substantiations
- An agreed national definition of the Principle
- Agreed and fully implemented practice guidelines
- No Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children being removed from their families or communities.

In pursuing these goals SNAICC will continue to pressure governments to honour their commitments under the Principle.

Contact: felicity@snaicc.asn.au

Something to think on

Extreme Recruitment

Edited from Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition. St Louis USA.

Extreme Recruitment is a race to find an adoptive home for a child in a fraction of the time it would normally take (12–20 weeks vs. 12–24 months). In only 12 months, 42 of 60 youth we worked with were matched with adoptive families; accomplishing three times the number of adoption matches in a third of the time.

We work with the hardest-to-place children: ages 10–18, sibling groups,

African-American children, and youth with emotional, developmental, or behavioral concerns. Extreme Recruitment is successful for any child in foster care because it:

1. Requires weekly, intensive meetings between the child's professional team for 12–20 weeks
2. Demands concentrated support from child welfare supervisors
3. Focuses on preparing the youth for adoption, including their mental health and educational needs.

The added ingredient that makes Extreme Recruitment so effective is our private investigator. Originally, we tried to do the investigation work ourselves, but our contact rate with relatives was a dismal 23%. Within two weeks of hiring

an investigator, the contact rate skyrocketed to 80%. Our investigator finds relatives through internet tools, court databases and good old-fashioned gum-shoe detective work.

This program is so powerful that we are now convinced that it will change the child welfare system in St. Louis. Locally, the entire child welfare system—the Children's Division, private agencies, and the courts—are excited about the results:

From: www.foster-adopt.org





Members of the NT Board of Inquiry: L-R: Dr Howard Bath, NT Children's Commissioner: Muriel Bamblett AM, CEO Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and former SNAICC Chair: Dr Rob Roseby, Deputy Director of Adolescent Health at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, and former Head of Paediatrics, Alice Springs Hospital.

The *Growing Them Strong Together Report into Aboriginal child protection in the NT* was released in October 2010. The response to report led to a sense the NT service system may finally change to give our children, their families and the NGO services with whom they are most involved, a much greater say, including in the development of a new NT peak body for our sector offering a more coordinated, supportive and community managed body to assist the development of the sector, built on values relevant to Aboriginal people. There have been a number of initiatives and discussions arising since the report was released, some of which have included SNAICC and the SNAICC EO Frank Hytten, who writes the following comment on developments: as they stand:

NT child welfare sector reform: an ongoing set of challenges

The challenges of the reforming the Northern Territory child welfare sector are both great and many. Government policy, structures and practice need to change drastically. The current structure of the sector built on non-Aboriginal NGOs needs to change. Finally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector itself needs support and development if changes are to occur and it is to gain the capacity to design, develop and deliver services to its own communities.

A clear government commitment to reform is needed. This is happening, but will take time and considerable input from NGO services and most importantly, the NT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. NGOs in the sector will also need to change, to redefine the relationship between the NGO and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sectors. A role change must develop which allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to design, develop and deliver services, with NGO infrastructure support as enablers, fund managers and providers of expertise for the dominant culture's systems, but NOT as directors or 'owners' of services offered. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities want to be responsible for the provision of services to their own communities – this must be encouraged and supported. The prospect of this happening is quite good as some NGOs seem willing to engage in this reform, but this will take time and sustained effort.

Finally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector will need to rise to these challenges by putting aside past experiences – for example, the experiences over several decades of being offered

some, often minimal, level of 'self-determination' which was then snatched away, often as the community was getting strong enough to develop and deliver their own services.

SNAICC has worked across all three sectors, supporting the development of common understandings of what is happening and a vision of what needs to happen. Once these two points are broadly agreed upon, the journey from one to the other may become self-evident. To date this has involved talking and meetings and more talking. SNAICC's role is NOT to direct, but to try to bring the different players together, offer ways forward and create spaces in which views can be aired and commonalities negotiated.

The task is huge, and the expectation that it can all be done quickly may cause some frustration and cynicism, but a sense of urgency is needed to drive the process. It is a balance between two that is needed. SNAICC seeks to slow the process down to allow genuine community participation in an evolving service system built from the bottom up. We need a genuine 'community development' approach, as the more that is imposed from above, the less likely it is to work. After several decades of failure in the top-down approach to 'fixing' the 'Aboriginal problem', SNAICC continues to argue and work for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership of the 'solutions'.

To reinforce SNAICC's belief in the importance of the task and our optimism for its success, recent SNAICC Management Sub-committee discussions reaffirmed our commitment to offer whatever service we can.

Contact: frank@snaicc.asna.au

SNAICC supports Elders' call on policy failures in the NT Intervention

SNAICC supports the call by NT Elders and prominent Australians on 7 February 2011 to stop the continuing policy failure and abrogation of human rights in the NT. :

SNAICC stands beside our NT brothers and sisters in calling for the Federal Government to respect basic human rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the NT. Three and a half years of erosion of self-determination and human rights through the NT Intervention continues to deny Aboriginal people a voice. There is far from conclusive evidence that the Intervention is making a positive impact on our families and children and plenty of evidence of harm.'

SNAICC has long called for action in dealing with child welfare in the NT

but short-term, unilateral, bureaucratic action without the active participation of Aboriginal people is futile. There is a growing body of evidence, especially from Canada, showing a clear correlation between the level of control that First Nations people have over their lives and improved health, education and employment outcomes. The National Framework for the Protection of Australia's Children explicitly calls for the development of culturally appropriate responses based on partnership with our families, communities and organisations. The NT Intervention cannot foster true

partnerships while so much of the policies are based on involuntary compliance, coercion, denial of human rights and little capacity for direct engagement with communities.

The Federal Government and Opposition have an opportunity to right the wrongs of the intervention' said Steve Larkins. 'I support the call for Minister Macklin to act now in complying with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, repeal the legislation that denies our children and families basic human rights and fully restore the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Contact: felicity@snaicc.asn.au.

SNAICC News June 2011

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

Introduction

The ATSI CPP is that part of child protection law that guides child protection staff in their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who need, or are already in, out of home care. The Principle is a legal recognition that state welfare agencies must, on an ongoing basis, meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ways which keep the child connected to and involved with their family, community and culture.

The Principle directs child protection workers and courts to consider the child's cultural needs and need for family and community connection as part of their decision making. It requires they follow a set process to find a placement for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child and meet their cultural care needs once placed.

Proper implementation of the Principle requires keeping the child physically, psychologically and culturally safe. The Principle reflects the idea that best interests of the child are met by considering their well being not just during the out of home care placement but over their whole life course.

The ATSI CPP was designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aboriginal child welfare services and has been adopted in law in all jurisdictions progressively since the mid-1980s.

The Principle in each state and territory sits within and is governed by broader child protection legislation. The broader requirements of the acts within which the Principle is embedded are designed to ensure that best interests of children in terms of their health safety and development are always properly considered.

While wording varies in each legislation, in essence the ATSI CPP:

1. Requires that efforts be made to support the child and family at home to prevent the need for removal. All legislation recognises that removal of any Aboriginal

or Torres Strait Islander child from their community and family environment by any welfare or government authority must be a last resort.

2. Requires that placement options for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children who need to be in out-of-home care be sought and considered according to a descending order of priorities with placement with extended family the first priority, with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community the second priority and with another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family the third priority. The final priority once the other options have been explored is placement with a non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander family.
3. Requires that relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations (and in some jurisdictions, the extended family) be consulted about the child's placement.
4. Requires that children who are placed with non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carers be assisted to keep in contact with their family, language and culture.
5. Aims to reunite children who are placed in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care with their families and communities.

The Bringing Them Home report (1997) identified the ongoing legacy of the systematic removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, up until the 1970s and the urgency of addressing the high rate of contemporary removals and protecting the current generation of our children from the grief and loss of identity suffered by many of their parents and grandparents.

Despite the *Bringing Them Home Report*, the last ten years has seen a rapid increase in both the number of our children being removed from their families for child protection reasons and the number being placed with non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families.

There are currently 11,468 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care in Australia. The majority

of these children are in NSW (5465) and Queensland (2686). Of all our children in out of home care 3370 are not placed with relatives / kin or another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander care giver. This is over triple the 913 children in 2001 not placed with relatives / kin or another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander care giver.

Given the scale of these contemporary removals, SNAICC is undertaking research and consultations with the view to producing resources to support a clearer community understanding of the Principle and improve compliance in each state and territory for the benefit of our children and families.

Some areas SNAICC is thinking and consulting about:

- Addressing the myths and misunderstandings about the ATSI CPP that work against its proper implementation.
- Clarifying that culture and safety are equally important and that the ATSI CPP supports both.
- Strengthening understanding that the ATSI CPP requires cultural care planning for children in out of home care.
- Strengthening understanding about the importance of culture and its relationship to well being in areas such as education and health.
- Highlighting the vital role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in implementing the Principle.
- Keeping a focus on the story of the Stolen Generations and the lessons of that story for child protection practice today.
- Communicating how the Principle benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities and what policies and practices and resources are needed to support its proper implementation.

Please contact us if you have views or information about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to share.

Contact: julie@snaicc.asn.au

Online documentation of ATSI CPP legislation nation-wide

SNAICC thanks Melbourne law firm Arnold Bloch Liebler for their work in documenting the sections of state and territory legislation that incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle and is pleased to make this information available on our website.

Contact: julie@snaicc.asn.au See: www.snaicc.asn.au



SNAICC is proud to release a new research report by Terri Libesman on ways of ensuring ongoing connection to family, community and culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care. The report is an important contribution to the the discussion about establishes the fundamental role of culture in children's everyday lives.

SNAICC holds that cultural care planning is a central part of implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP). All states and territories have all made commitment to this principle and have a legal obligation to provide cultural care plans but few fulfil their obligation.

Full compliance with the ACPP does not end with placement but continues through the child's time in the child protection system through providing cultural support, reunion with family, connection to family and community and planned, supported transition out of care. SNAICC extends thanks to the author of this report Terri Libesman, Lecturer, Law Faculty of the University of Technology Sydney and the LAC Project Australia and Barnardos for their support and joint management of the project with SNAICC.

The following article is an edited from a presentation by Terri Libesman to the SNAICC National Executive, March 2011.



OUT-OF-POUCH CARE

Cultural care for our children in out-of-home care – by Terri Libesman

This new report on *Cultural care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care builds on SNAICC's work over many decades towards a child welfare system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and people look after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples' well being.*

The report makes recommendations about cultural care based on research and the extremely clear messages from focus groups and interviews, an analysis of the legislative and policy frameworks across the country and a significant contribution made by many SNAICC Executive members and SNAICC staff.

I hope that this report will assist with advocacy for greater control by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities over the welfare and wellbeing of children in out of home care, in particular with strengthening and supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle through national and perhaps international advocacy through the *Convention on the Rights of Child*,

The recommendations are about preventing another Stolen Generation, responding to past wrongs through support for contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples' cultural security, especially for the most vulnerable – those in out of home care.

The report has 27 recommendations from which I here highlight two key themes: cultural care and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICCP).

Providing and supporting cultural

care for our children and young people is about recognising, supporting and empowering our families, communities and organisations. There already exists within the ATSICCP a right to cultural care in legislation in all Australian jurisdictions. This needs to be fully implemented and strengthened.

The ATSICCP has been one of the outstanding achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. It needs to be supported and built upon. There have been attempts to undermine the Principle in some parts of the country. I hope this report:

- Supports a response to these attempts;
- Expands recognition to include gazetting or designation of participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations where this has not been implemented;
- Expands the role of designated organisations where this already occurs.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child said in their last report on Australia's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child that the ATSICCP needs to be fully implemented. Our research has found that the aspect of the principle which is least complied with relates to those children and young people who are most at risk of being severed from their families, communities and culture – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children placed in out of home care with non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and who are looked after by non Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out of home care organisations.

Even if all necessary resources and reforms are made, these children and young people will remain a significant proportion

of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care in the short to medium term. Some of the reasons why this will remain the case are:

- The high rate of placement in out of home care for our children and young people compared with all other children
- The relatively small percentage of our children and young people in out of home care looked after by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies;
- Capacity building of our agencies is not proportionate to rate children and young people are in out of home care;
- Our children spend a longer in out of home care compared with all children;
- Poverty places strain on our carers;
- Inadequate resources for our agencies;
- Inadequate kin & foster carer support.

It is crucial all aspects of the ATSICCP be supported including support for our children who are in non-indigenous care with non indigenous agencies. While the longer term objective is to have all our children in out of home care with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, in the short to medium term, those children who are not need support for their cultural care. This report recommends that this be done through funding linking agents within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, to fulfil a task these organisations are already called on to do, but without the funding.

Cultural care

'They just want to put it in a box, put a boomerang on it and call it culture. Cultural care is more complex than this.'

Focus group participant.

We started the project looking at some excellent templates *Continued next page*

for a cultural support plan prepared by out of home care organisations and government departments across the country. They included many of the aspects of cultural care which most of our focus groups also identified as important:

- The centrality of extended family and community;
- The right to be connected to land and place

However, good cultural support plans can only be made if those helping the young person to make them are engaged with, and have knowledge about, the child, their family and particular culture. Further, the best cultural care plan will only be a good record for a child or young person if it is also about their cultural inclusion in daily life.

The report describes a range of practical ways that cultural care plans can be prepared and implemented. All government departments claimed a commitment to cultural care, and what they do and don't do to fulfil this commitment is outlined in the report. The following are some of the greatest barriers to cultural care:

- The lack of understanding, or sometimes recognition of contemporary urban and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- The failure to recognise the importance of culture for children's day to day well being in areas such as education and health.
- The lack of connections to or comfort on the part of non indigenous agencies and carers in connecting with our families and communities.
- The lack of resources for our agencies and sometimes families to support cultural care, including to trace and locate family and facilitate the child or young person's relationships with family and community.

All participants said that cultural care cannot be provided though good cultural support plan templates without strong support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies to help implement them. Moreover although data is not kept, a large number (probably most) of our children in non indigenous care, do not have a cultural support plan let alone an implemented plan.

The failure of government departments to translate a stated commitment to cultural care into a reality is evident in the lack of dedicated resources for cultural care planning and the consequent pressures on our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies to provide non funded cultural care advice.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP)

The ATSICPP is the cornerstone of the right to cultural care. There are many reasons why despite this Principle large numbers of our children remain in non Aboriginal care with non Aboriginal agencies, who are not providing cultural support, while looking after them.

The disproportionate rate of our children in out of home care, as well as the poverty many families and communities face, places great pressures on many kin and foster carers. These matters are related to past discriminatory government policies which continue to impact.

It is not fair that our kin and foster carers bear the brunt of the cost and pressures arising from them. Greater support for kin and foster carers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's organisations and children and young people in out of home care should be part of the reparation which governments owe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for past wrongs.

There is a legal obligation to assist our children placed in non indigenous care to keep in contact with family, language and culture. The responsibilities of governments and out of home care agencies, and the legal rights of children and family with respect to the ATSICPP do not end once a child has been placed. One of the most neglected aspects of the ATSICPP is support for birth families to attain reconciliation where this is safe and practical, and to provide cultural support for children in out of home care where reconciliation is not practical.

The message from all non indigenous out of home care focus groups was that they needed the assistance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies to make and implement cultural support plans for our children in their care. All we spoke with were committed to cultural care but did not believe they had the understanding or resources to provide effective cultural care for our children in their care.

There is an urgent need for funded cultural care linking agents within our agencies. Without these, already extended Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies are placing a strain on their core functions and work to attempt to provide this help either without funding or with completely inadequate funding.

The benefit of Aboriginal



and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care being looked after by our own carers and agencies is clear from the research anecdotal evidence. However there is a lack of hard data. Recommendations are therefore made to collect data with respect to the success of outcomes for our children looked after by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and carers.

The ATSICPP needs to be built on to attain full compliance. This requires:

- Greater support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to address the underlying reasons why a disproportionate rate of our children, compared with all children, are removed from their families;
- To increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin, foster and residential care placements for our children and support for these carers;
- To increase the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander out of home care agencies;
- To support those children and young people who are placed with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers, and who are looked after by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies.

Contact: julie@snaicc.asn.au



Interview with Graham Atkinson about the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

Graham Atkinson worked at VACCA 1978-1981 as senior social worker and program director, where he and other founding members drew up the ACPP.

I was the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) senior social worker from February 1978 until I left in 1982. VACCA negotiated with the Department of Social Welfare, the predecessor of DHS, about alternatives to removing children from the families and community. I worked along with Adrianna Palomara from the department with the support of some VACCA board members and program director Mollie Dyer. As she worked in the department, Adrianna could gather data on the removal of Aboriginal children.

Adrianna and I, plus Mollie drafted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. Through that work we see the draft we have now. It consumed a lot of our time.

The VACCA model of child and family support provided through a dedicated Aboriginal community controlled agency (ACCA), and included the ACPP as a key policy, was based on the work of Maxine Robbins of the Yakima Indian Nation, Assistant Director of the Association on American Indian Affairs, USA. She planted the seed.

In the mid 1970s Mollie was working with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the government assisted her to visit family support programs in North America. She was inspired by the Yakima Indian Nation in reducing the rate of child removal, and returned to Australia to establish VACCA, which soon became a service model in other states and territories, but not in a 'one size fits all' manner. Each state adapted their own models. When VACCA convened the First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar in 1979 with assistance from the Commonwealth Office of Child Care, Stephen Unger and Maxine Robbins came as guest speakers. Mollie and I accompanied Maxine and Stephen on a national tour, speaking on the *North American Indian Child Welfare Act 1978*.

In the late 1970s / early 1980s most ACCAs were voluntary associations. The federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) saw AICCA funding as a federal Office of Child Care (OCC) responsibility, so Marie Coleman and the OCC came into the picture, funding VACCA in 1977 and then other AICCAs. So VACCA was the standard bearer.

As the ACCAs developed their alliance, the Aboriginal Child Placement

Principle (ACPP) policies became the peg many other issues hung off. The funding support for the ACPP and the ACCAs became entwined, and Maxine's visit led to discussion about establishing a formal national network structure and advocacy structure.

In late 1979, Adrianna Palomara and I, supported by Mollie Dyer and the VACCA directors, plus Brian Butler from the SA Aboriginal Child Care Agency, developed a funding submission to the OCC for AICCA secretariat support – which became the new Melbourne-based Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), supported by VACCA to become first funded in 1983.

While the DAA didn't want the funding responsibility for the ACPP, they saw themselves as responsible for the wider policy context. We lobbied the Victorian Department of Welfare through Ken Williams and Brian Dixon, the Victorian Minister of Social Welfare, who was very supportive of VACCA. It wasn't a push over I can tell you! The state wanted the AICCA funding to be a federal responsibility.

I finally left VACCA in 1982 to work with the Aboriginal Development Commission – Marjorie Thorpe took over my position. I stayed on the VACCA Board for another year. Around 1986 I set up my own consultancy business and in 1990 I did a report on the Joint National Review of Aboriginal and Islander Agencies (AICCAs) presented to Dept Community Services and Health Child Care Administration and Development Branch. While the department accepted my report, SNAICC rejected some of the recommendations. Unfortunately the process and my report to SNAICC, became politicised by different factions.

Government departments support the Principle, but always shy away from its implementation because of the resources required. They liked to refer to the policies, but have never provided sufficient resources to make it work. Since the early days this has been a continuing stumbling block, not just in the child and family welfare area. Policy initiatives such as the ACPP seem for policy makers to be all right in theory, but in practice are another issue.

The question of resources affects the number of Aboriginal carers for our children. Effective recruitment requires extensive resources to overcome



the disadvantage and challenges facing Aboriginal families. Yet, some Aboriginal families are getting on OK. The real challenge is that instead of overloading the capacity of struggling families, how do we engage with families that can cope with caring for our children?

I support the 'intensive family support model' as opposed to the 'catch all' approach. Biting off too much is hard to sustain and drains your limited resources.

Around 2000 I did some work for the Burrai program in Shepparton to help them recruit carers. Governments need to look at those projects that have had an impact. Burrai's approach strived to develop relationships with the carers and provide support for the carers. Another intensive family support program like this was the Wanjana Lidji program in Morwell. The intensive care family support model where a caseworker works only with up to three families at a time rather than a case load of 60 plus is more effective. An effective mentoring program is a useful back up for these programs as well.

So can we implement the ACPP? We need evidence based arguments and not just broad philosophical arguments. We have to mount the argument, present a persuasive case. It doesn't just rest on rhetoric or philosophical argument. It's easy to criticize, but you have to show the evidence and offer options.

Some of the earlier principles were self-determination, equality, the rights of Indigenous peoples. We looked at the impact on kids that were ending up in institutions where Aboriginal people were over-represented. We looked for a better alternative.

We had our 'Gubbariginal' friends, non-Aboriginal people supportive of our child welfare issues. In my consultancy work in Victoria we found that a large proportion (70%) of Aboriginal households have one non-Aboriginal parent so there is also the issue of what happens when a child is placed with their non-Aboriginal family. In an ideal world it would be good if Aboriginal kids were kept in Aboriginal families, but often the circumstances are dysfunctional and lacking in capacity to

care properly for a removed child, and the interests of the child are always paramount. Therefore, in my early days at VACCA we did not exclude non-Aboriginal carers, but on the proviso they don't bring up a child as a non-Aboriginal, that they acknowledged and recognised the child's culture. You have to use negotiation and build your case through the process, rather than press the guilt button.

Culture is important for children and adults who have been removed. I feel the key aspiration is connecting to your ancestral land and managing and protecting your cultural heritage. You can get that connection back, if the passion is strong enough, but stop short of over-compensating for that which is lost. You can be proud of your identity and still pursue other aspirations. You can have your cultural pride and have the other benefits society offers. Cultures find ways to morph into other cultures, if it benefits them to do so.

It's hard work at the coal face. Placing a child in a safer environment needs to be weighed against their dire circumstances. With the help of my training and experience I made these judgments. It didn't endear me to some. Many kids we placed did not reject their Aboriginality,

and came back, supported by their families. It's a hard decision, especially for young kids. Often they are caught between a rock and a hard place, but when it's a choice between safety and dysfunctionality I chose the former.

If the resources are provided to recruit more Aboriginal carers I would have sympathy for those that say 'it has to be an Aboriginal carer, full stop.' But if you are working at the coal face and don't have enough carers, that's the dilemma. As we did when VACCA was first established a case can be made for 'Gubbariginals' – non-Aboriginal carers. Can children wait or forego their childhood while sufficient Aboriginal carers have been found?

My worry is where it's going at the moment. My research and observations are there are still too many Aboriginal children removed from their families.

The paradox is that the systems are still struggling to get more Aboriginal carers. Can we ask kids to wait for that to happen? The short term investment may be high. The intensive family support model, plus effective carer recruitment and selection programs, might reduce the staff burn-out rate in Aboriginal child and family support services.



Left: 1970 Nui Dat South Vietnam, Australian Army base, Tank Squadron.

Below: 1977 Graham & mother Iris Atkinson graduation day, Uni. of Melbourne, B. Social Work.



About Graham Atkinson

I am a proud Yorta Yorta / Dja Dja Wurrung man. I was born on one of my traditional lands in Echuca on the Murray River, I had finished school in year nine and went on to work as a turner and fitter in a ball-bearing factory – it wasn't very stimulating work, but it offered a secure job in those days.

The 1967 Referendum recognised Aboriginal people as equal citizens. Ironically, in 1968 I turned 20 and my Lucky Number came up. I was conscripted and spent two years as a national service man and a year in Australia's army base at Nui Dat in South Vietnam. The army offered interesting opportunities, and I completed an equivalent of a leaving certificate.

My army experience had a big impact – fighting a war when so many of my own Aboriginal community in Australia were excluded from things mainstream society took for granted. I saw the darker side of non-Aboriginal intervention in another country fighting for its liberation. It led me to thinking what can I do for my own community. I saw social work and completing my own education as important for advancing Aboriginal peoples. The army benefits for returned soldiers helped me matriculate in 1972 when I moved to Melbourne with my small family. In the summer holidays I worked part-time at the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, eventually doing a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Melbourne. I graduated in 1977 and was the first Aboriginal social worker to work with VACCA.'

Graham is now co-owner of Atkinson Kerr & Associates with Stephen Kerr, targeting Indigenous social reform strategies in health, justice and social justice.

Contact: graham@atkinsonkerr.com.au

RAATSICC / FNQ – keeping connected with culture

Desley Thompson, CEO Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Advisory Association Inc. (RAATSICC) and SNAICC National Executive member said:

'I see a number of our children from Cape York communities being removed and being placed in care in Cairns or somewhere a long way from their community. I see how the culture is slowly being lost, especially the language. When I was caring for Cape York children, there was no way I could connect with their culture. Even though we're an Aboriginal family, looking

after Aboriginal children, specifically from a different area, clan group or language group; it's a different world for those children. It's not just an Aboriginal thing – it goes deeper than that – it is about language, hunting, feasting- again specifically from their land ... Yes, the Department takes children back over the school holidays, but is it enough?

'I believe, the younger the children are the more culture they lose. You have to be growing up there to learn and maintain culture. And when children get older and go to boarding school in Brisbane, Cairns, Charters Towers, etc, hopefully the culture is instilled by then. This year RAATSICC

will be encouraging our Elders to yarn with our children in care whilst they are back in their communities over the school holidays. To discuss the importance of culture and how they can maintain it whilst out their community.

'Keeping our children connected to culture is important. I have lost so much language and traditions since my nan and mum passed away and we haven't been out on country for ages. We should never be too busy and forget our land and teaching our children all about it.

Contact: desley@raatsicc.org.au

New National Standards for Out-of-Home Care

16 Dec 2010: Commonwealth, State & Territory Community & Disability Services Ministers endorsed the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care – a key reform under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020.

SNAICC has been at the forefront of developing these new National Out of Home Care Standards. SNAICC has been instrumental in ensuring that the new standard 3 dealing with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle gives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people an active role in decision making.

Standard 3 reads that: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people.* This means that jurisdictions are responsible for ensuring active participation in decision making, not just consultation.

SNAICC will continue to work with the Commonwealth, states and territories to develop consistent accountability

mechanisms, definitions and practices around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle.

The CDSMC Communique 16 December 2010 notes:

'Ministers agreed that the roll-out of the National Standards for Out-of-Home Care would begin from 1 July 2011, with an annual public report on progress.

'The new standards will provide a national benchmark for the care of children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, no matter which state or territory they are in.

The national standards focus on the critical areas of providing children with access to health, education and training, as well as increased support for carers and improved planning for children's transition from care.'

13 National Standards for out-of-home care

Standard 1: Children and young people will be provided with stability and security during their time in care.

Standard 2: Children and young people participate in decisions that have an impact on their lives.

Standard 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people.

Standard 4: Each child and young person has an individualised plan that details their health, education and other needs.

Standard 5: Children and young people have their physical, developmental, psychosocial and mental health needs assessed and attended to in a timely way.

Standard 6: Children and young people in care access and participate in education and early childhood services to maximise their educational outcomes.

Standard 7: Children and young people up to at least 18 years are supported to be engaged in appropriate education, training and/or employment.

Standard 8: Children and young people in care are supported to participate in social and/or recreational activities of their choice, such as sporting, cultural or community activity.

Standard 9: Children and young people are supported to safely and appropriately maintain connection with family, be they birth parents, siblings or other family members.

Standard 10: Children and young people in care are supported to develop their identity, safely and appropriately, through contact with their families, friends, culture, spiritual sources and communities and have their life history recorded as they grow up.

Standard 11: Children and young people in care are supported to safely and appropriately identify and stay in touch, with at least one other person who cares about their future, who they can turn to for support and advice.

Standard 12: Carers are assessed and receive relevant ongoing training, development and support, in order to provide quality care.

Standard 13: Children and young people have a transition from care plan commencing at 15 years old which details support to be provided after leaving care.

Standard 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people

Over-arching principles *Principles to assist in the interpretation of the 13 national standards for out-of-home care*

- Children and young people in out-of-home care have their rights respected and are treated in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Care provided to children and young people living in out-of-home care is focussed on providing a nurturing environment, promoting their best interests, and maximising their potential.
- Children and young people living in out-of-home care are provided with opportunities for their voice to be heard and respected and have the right to clear and consistent information about the reasons for being in care.
- Care provided to children and young people will promote the benefits of ongoing safe, meaningful and positive connection and involvement of parents and families and communities of origin.
- Carers and their families are key stakeholders and partners in

the care of children and young people, and their role is to be respected and supported.

- Children and young people living in out-of-home care are provided with a level of quality care that addresses their particular needs and improves their life outcomes.
- Continuous system improvements are designed to achieve better outcomes for all children and young people living in out-of-home care.
- Out-of-home care for children and young people is measured, monitored and reported in a transparent, efficient and consistent manner over time.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are to be involved in decisions in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.

The new national standards and the Coalition

– A Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety & Wellbeing of Australia's Children

SNAICC has advocated for national standards and legislation in child welfare since its 1981 SNAICC Conference Statement of Purpose. As a founding NGO member, SNAICC values the strong support of the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children in advocating for the rights of our children and families. Coalition Chair Brian Babington (CEO Families Australia) sent Coalition members the following advice in relation to the new standards:

'Reaching this point is a major accomplishment under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. The Standards are a first for Australia. They will provide a national benchmark for the care of children and young people unable to live with their parents, no matter which State or Territory they are in.

'The NGO Coalition played a major and decisive role in the development of the Standards a big thank you to everyone involved in the consultations and working groups over the past 18 months. Immediately before they considered the Standards, ten Coalition-appointed representatives met Ministers and senior officials to brief them on the national standards, as well as to discuss other key national projects under the Framework such as

Closing the Gap, transitioning to independence, support for carers, and the common approach to assessment, referral and support.

'This Ministerial-level meeting was a first for the Coalition and indicated the significance which Governments are placing on working with the Coalition. We anticipate further annual Ministerial-Coalition meetings. CDSMC Ministers agreed that support for young people leaving care would continue to be a priority. They agreed to develop a nationally consistent approach to leaving care plans. A proposed national approach will be brought back to Ministers at their next meeting. Additionally, Ministers released a report on current financial and non-financial support available for carers – a stocktake of initiatives in each state and territory, and nationally, for foster carers, as well as informal carers including grandparent and other kinship carers.

'The Standards also provide that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are to participate in decisions concerning the care and placement of their children and young people. In addition, carers are assessed and receive relevant ongoing training, development and support, in order to provide quality care.'

Contact: emily@snaicc.asn.au



JOEY LOOKING FOR A POUCH

AIHW: Child Protection Australia 2009–10

- Since 2009 almost 1000 more of our children were taken away
- An increase in the rate of our children on care and protection orders
- An increase in the number of our children placed with non-indigenous carers
- A DECREASE in 2009–10 in intensive family support services

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has released their annual report: **Child Protection Australia 2009–10, containing comprehensive information on state and territory child protection and support services, and the characteristics of Australian children within the child protection system.**

SNAICC is concerned by the increasing representation of our children in the child protection system. The support child protection systems provides our children must be recognised by greater sustainable

investment.

An increasing focus on primary, holistic preventative services on keeping children and families safe and together is needed, yet despite the continuing surge in our children on care and protection orders and placed outside the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, this new data indicates a decreased emphasis on intensive family support services!

Many of our Aboriginal services have a primary, preventative services model, such as the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) and the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS). Capacity building of such community-controlled organisations is key to successful engagement with our families and

communities (see the SNAICC Service Access Policy)

Some key data emerging

- In 2009–10: our children were almost eight times as likely to be the subject of substantiations as non-indigenous children (rates of 35.3 and 4.6 per 1000 children respectively). This is higher than rate of 7.5 for 2008–9.
- At 30 June 2010 The rate of our children on care and protection orders was nine times the rate of non-indigenous children (rates of 48.3 and 5.4 per 1,000 children, respectively). This is higher than rate of eight for 2008–9. Over 30% of children on orders are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- The rate of our children in out-of-home care was almost ten times the rate of non-indigenous children (rate of 48.4 and 5.0 per 1000 children respectively). This is the same as 2008–9.
- 71% of Indigenous children were placed with relatives/kin, other Indigenous caregivers or in Indigenous residential care. 2010 70.5, a decrease of over 5% since 2006–07. (2009–72.7%; 2008 74.0%; 2007–76.0%; 2006 –75.7%.)
- A DECREASE in 2009–10 in the number of intensive family support services from 2008–09 (254 services) down to 207 services delivered across 244 locations – a decrease of 47 services. The cause of this decline is unclear – whether it is from merging of services or a decrease in intensive services, (only a small part of this decline is from lack of ACT data.)

Contact: felicity@snaicc.asn.au

Financial & Non-Financial Support for Formal & Informal Out of Home Carers

Under the Support for Carers national priority FaHCSIA commissioned the research project to explore the payments and services available to carers in order to analyse gaps and inequities in support. Authors: Marilyn McHugh and Kylie Valentine, Social Policy Research Service, Uni. of NSW.

Our new intensive service workers will carry no more than two families at a time – 22 families a year. It will be time limited to 12–16 weeks intensive and after that goes to a step-down worker for a further 16 weeks, and then hopefully we can seek further funding for a generalist worker for groups. There will be a 24 hour on-call crisis service, and the program will focus on things like getting kids ready for school in the morning, getting routines in place, buying groceries, getting people to think about kids needs, inviting parents to look at their own responsibilities, addressing why these kids are going in care.

A lot of our families are not aware why their children are taken, and programs like PPP or Brighter Futures don't work well for a lot of our families. We needed programs talking with families about why their children are in care – not tie-dyeing and making necklaces! So we wrote a parenting program about why our kids in care, teaching parenting skills - our families need to know it isn't ok to use money on grog, and leave kids to play cards. How do you know if you've never been taught? We did the Marumali program about the Stolen Generation and how to regain culture and the importance of family for Aboriginal people. Auntie Lorraine Peeters has now asked us to pilot a program with her as part of our intensive program for kids about maintaining connection with culture. Parents don't set out to be abusive, we need to invite them to recognise their role in the child protection, and the impact of not being parented themselves on their own children.

Our Stolen Generation were fed and educated, but came out damaged. Our kids need a sense of identity and self, because kids always want to go back to their families, as it's not just the abuse, there's lots of different relationships kids have with parents, not just the bad, there's birthdays, fishing etc and– we need to be good at offering alternative ways of parenting. You can have contact with birth families, maintain connections with culture and have good nurturing care. Very occasionally kids can't have contact with birth parents, but that is rare in my experience.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle

I don't think bureaucracy wants to not implement the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle - just some things get in the way. The Principle talks about self-determination, but how do you have that in a crisis-driven event? It takes about less than two week emergency placements, but all these cases are emergencies! You don't know how long they will be in this situation,

and there is a lot in the assessment process. It may seem like apathy, but our families are not aware of the severity of statutory intervention and don't understand that the state becomes the legal parents.

Kids come into care through a crisis placement, so they are placed with non-Aboriginal parents. The two weeks go by and they are still there. The community service staff are overworked and under-resourced, but have to get the assessment and the statutory report done. It goes on and on, and they try hard, but the red tape gets in the way, then the magistrates want a court clinician's report on the family, and that takes weeks too.

I thought the Principle was great when it first came out, but it seems the legal requirements now overwhelm self-determination – magistrates try to adhere to the legislation but forced to do other things and the legal system set up to protect our kids becomes our worst enemy. Legal things get in the way and then you have a crisis placement from two weeks to three months to six months, and the child bonds to the new carers, so then you can't move them. Wood was rightly scathing about not adhering to the Principle but you can't endanger the kid through inappropriate family assessments either – just putting kids with family who may be inappropriate, like used to happen and is starting to happen again and it's wrong. There has to be a better way. We need a peak forum that gets together with the legal bodies, the statutory bodies, peak Aboriginal agencies, influenced by the grass roots. It would need to get together a lot to sort it out – a forum to get the court and the clinicians reports, and the family assessments expedited and done well. Our kids need to be protected by the same national legislation – currently we can't even do cross-border transfers properly! Every state gets a bit precious, and it leaves our kids vulnerable. We need a summit to talk about it – for all children at



risk, to sort this out once and for all.

NSW now has an accreditation process, the Children's Guardian, who oversees everything we do. The days where we were set up to fail are long gone. We have to be professional and have the best outcomes for our kids, and we need more community controlled services. The departments talk about consultation, but usually mean they talk with themselves. Our service has 72 foster carers on our books – community services in our area have 3 or 4.

We have a good relationship with the local community service centre. They do try, but they have a lot of constraints. The message around self-determination is that we have to be the people making the decisions about our children, not the departmental workers. We find that when there are criticisms of a department they do try to address it but they are assessing families badly and not listening to what the community is saying, it's too hard.

The key message is the current legislation defeats itself. Adhere to the Principle: don't throw it around in a token way. Child protection is the elephant in the room – they don't really talk about it. Acknowledge that we are the experts and we have the evidence. We can place children, with Aboriginal foster carers, into supportive nurturing long term placements without them leaving country or family.

Contact: dana@burrundalai.org.au



L–R: Richard Kelly & Narnie Griffin (case workers), Leah Warwick (office manager), Takishiee Roberts (admin), Robert Silva (foster care support), Dana Clarke at their accreditation dinner dance last year – celebrating their five year accreditation as a designated agency under the *Children and Young Persons Care and Protection Act, 1998* to arrange out-of-home care for children and young people in NSW. 'We are very proud of ourselves,' said Takishiee Roberts. Congratulations to Burrundalai staff on their accreditation! (Staff Annette Toomey & Suzanne Holten not in picture).

SNAICC 2010 AGM

Significant events at the November Melbourne AGM and the first meeting of the incoming National Executive were:

- Announcement of election results to the SNAICC National Executive 2010–12
- Election of the new SNAICC Management Committee 2010–2012
- Tabling the SNAICC Annual Report 2010
- Endorsement of the draft SNAICC Strategic Plan 2011–2016.

Elections of the SNAICC National Executive

Following a call for nominations for membership of the SNAICC National Executive from all SNAICC full member organisations, the National Executive members elected to hold office from the close of the 2010 AGM until the close of the 2012 AGM were announced at the Melbourne AGM.

There remain several vacancies open on the SNAICC National Executive for members from the NT, ACT and Tasmania – SNAICC members from those states are encouraged to make an expression of interest in joining the National Executive.

Category A – Childcare services

QLD: Gundoo Day Care Centre – Ray Burrows

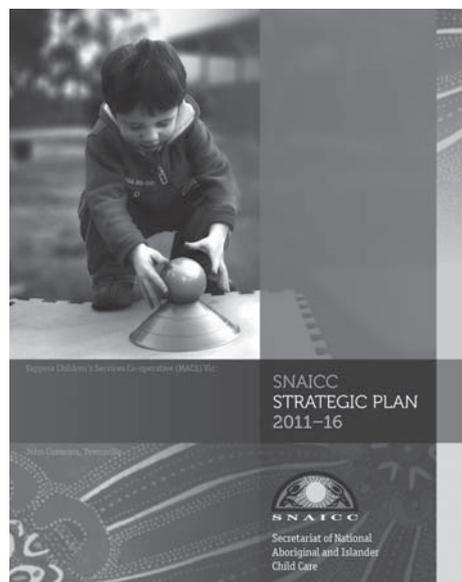
WA: Gurlongga Njini Association Inc. (MACS) – Dot Bagshaw

VIC: Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) – Rose Bamblett

TAS: Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA) – Lisa Coulson

SNAICC Strategic Plan 2011–2016 SNAICC Annual Report 2010

The SNAICC Annual Report 2010 was released at the Melbourne SNAICC AGM on 18 November. Hard copies were sent to SNAICC members, paid up subscribers and complementary resource recipients.



NSW: Noogaleek Children's Centre (MACS) – Roslynn Webb

SA: Network SA Resource, Advisory and Management Services Inc. – Leona Smith

ACT: Wreck Bay, Gudjahgahmiamia MACS – Reuben Ardler

Vacancies: NT, ACT.

Category B – Child & family welfare services

NSW: AbSec (Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat) – Steve Larkins

WA: Yorganop Association – Dawn Wallam

SA: Aboriginal Family Support Services – Sharron Williams

QLD: Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services Ltd (TAIHS) – Angelina Akee

VIC: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) – Emma Bamblett

Vacancies: NT, TAS, ACT

Category C – Local early learning & preschool services

VIC: Lulla's Children and Family Centre – Geraldine Atkinson

Category D – Local child and family welfare services

Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Family Community Care Centre – Garry Matthews

Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Advisory Association Inc. (RAATSICC) – Desley Thompson.

In discussion:

QLD: Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Ltd (Brisbane

Office QATSICPP) – Dianne Harvey

SNAICC Management Sub-Committee

The incoming SNAICC National Executive elected the following members to the SNAICC Management Sub-Committee 2010–2012:

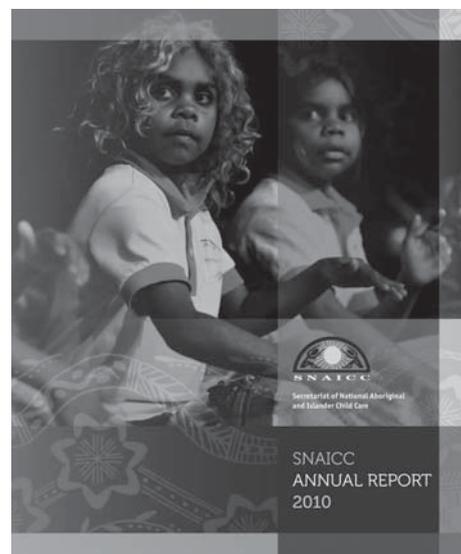
- **Chair** – Steve Larkins
- **Deputy Chair Early Years** – Geraldine Atkinson
- **Deputy Chair Child Welfare** – Dawn Wallam
- **Treasurer** – Garry Matthews
- **Secretary** – Desley Thompson

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled children and family services supporting SNAICC's aims and objectives can become a full SNAICC member on application to the SNAICC National Executive and forwarding a copy of their constitution.

The SNAICC National Executive is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled children and family services, elected by postal ballot of financial full members for a two-year term.

Our child and family services are all encouraged to contact their local members regarding issues they would like to see raised at the SNAICC National Executive.

Contact: admin@snaicc.asn.au



- A strong national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The new plan outlines the national policy context, looks forward to both new and continuing developments and provides a full version of the new SNAICC Statement of Purpose adopted at the SNAICC Special AGM (19 May 2010).

The new plan is available in both hard copy and electronic format www.snaicc.asn.au/aboutus Email us to request free print copies of the Annual Report and the Strategic Plan.

Contact: publications@snaicc.asn.au

SNAICC News June 2011

Welcome to new SNAICC National Executive members

Angelina Akee – Queensland child and family welfare representative



Angelina Kee was elected as a member of the SNAICC National Executive at the 2010 AGM. Angelina is the Director Operational Services, Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service Recognised Entity (TAIHS RE). She told SNAICC News her story:

'I have been involved in both Aboriginal and TSI affairs for many years. I was a founding member of the former Townsville AICCA and

have been involved in women's issues and aged care, I'm the Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service North QLD; involved in housing with the National Secretariat of TSI organisations; Chair of the Trust of the Townsville and TSI Cultural Centre.

'TAIHS is one of the oldest Aboriginal Medical Services, being 38 years old this year. Our Recognised Entity program and family support services are two years old. I also manage the SEWB and the primary health care programs, accommodation for homeless men and youth, the volatile substance misuse program, family intervention, placement services and fostering. Altogether 13 programs with over 100 staff.

'I identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. On my father's side I am Bindal Juru, and my mother was originally from Darnley Island, removed to Hammond Island and then on to Mackay

'The current TAIHS CEO Tanya Akee is my only child... she is very committed to improving Aboriginal and TSI health – and that's just how I bought her up to be!

My mother really kept us together - taught us about family values, respect and commitment to our people. My Dad fought in New Guinea in the War and was shocked at the discrimination when he came home. That's when he realised he had to stand up for our rights.

'I put my hand up to be on the SNAICC Board now because of the current removal of our children under the Queensland Child Safety policies. It seems to have got worse since Queensland government disempowered and defunded our AICCAs. The government is now implementing its own agenda. The AICCAs had more power in determining where our children would get placed. The policy today is not culturally appropriate and there are too many foster care restrictions.

'We have to maintain a national voice, to be active on organisations like SNAICC and NACCHO, as without these national organisations, our people don't know where to turn to. Going to the SNAICC National conference in Alice Springs last year brought back a lot of past struggles to get recognition for AICCAs and SNAICC in the early days. The time is right to get back involved in SNAICC.'

Contact: aakee@taihs.net.au

Reuben Ardler – ACT early childhood representative



Reuben Adler is General Manager at the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council which includes running the Gudjagahmiamia (MACS) Early Learning Centre. Wreck Bay Village is an Aboriginal community of about 300 in the Jervis Bay Territory on the east coast, 2.5 hrs south of Sydney, 3hrs NE of Canberra.

'I believe it's important to be a part of SNAICC as a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body. It's important that there be an Indigenous voice lobbying the different tiers of governments to ensure that Indigenous issues are being addressed and programs and policy are being developed that take into account the cultural needs of Indigenous children and families.'

'I worked many years as a public servant with various departments including the Aboriginal Development Commission, Department of Employment, Education and Training and have also sat on various boards during my working life.'

'This is my second SNAICC Executive meeting. The discussions are robust in the Executive which is good and the issues being discussed are very relevant in addressing the disadvantages communities face from a community point of view.

'It is vitally important communities develop capacity to manage their affairs and I think focusing on early childhood learning will help us towards achieving our goals.'

Contact: reuben.ardler@wbacc.gov.au

SNAICC in the media spotlight

SNAICC Policy Forum November 2010: SNAICC Executive and staff participated in practical interview and media training workshop with Saltwater Media Solutions. The workshop included how to engage the media, press release production and interview technique and dealing with reporters – both aggressive and friendly... That's our Katherine Pinkerton from Yorganop WA standing up to Luke Waters from Saltwater Media...



Queensland child protection changes and *Combined Voices*

Combined Voices of Queensland sent the following report of their campaign to shift child protection policy for Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and families; to acknowledge what has been gained through the Combined Voices campaign and to indicate what more needs to be done. Combined Voices are developing an action plan to be released later this year, and encourages services and peaks in all other states and territories to take up a similar campaign, to come together on behalf of our children. They write:

Combined Voices was successful in its campaign to shift child protection policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in Queensland. The shift was not as great as we wanted, but it was in the right direction and has been of great significance.

With the support of QCOSS, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition, PeakCare, the CREATE Foundation, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), Combined Voices was able for the first time to reach agreement with the State Minister, Hon Phil Reeves, MP, to go beyond the narrow, regulatory constraints of Recognised Entities (REs).

As a result, Queensland now has 11 regional lead agencies implementing family support services, as well as 11 restructured regional lead agency REs. This policy change is the first phase in moving Queensland's child protection policies onto the front foot. For years child protection policies have been on the back foot, concentrating on responding to children and their families when they come into care through 'notification' or a 'child concern'

report. This has meant REs have been confined to dealing with a limited check-list of processes clustered around the courts and operational controls exercised by the Dept. Communities (Child Safety). The Combined Voices campaign aimed to change this, pointing out this policy was doing nothing to slow and stop the increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into 'care'. Their proportion of all children in care under the state government's reactive policy grew to more than 38% of all children in care.

Building on the 2007–08 / 2008–09 evidence-based data and research of QATSICPP's policy officer, Julie Bray, Combined Voices mounted a compelling campaign to convince the Minister and some senior departmental staff that a circuit breaker was needed in the form of family support and intervention. We would like to thank everyone involved and associated with Combined Voices. Queensland has not been a progressive state historically when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, so the 2010 breakthrough is a real achievement. *(continued top next page)*

Welcome – new community based lower Gulf & Cape York CP workers

Desley Thompson, CEO of Cape York/ Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Advisory Association Inc (RAATSIC) told SNAICC News the following story:

'Under the recent restructure of Queensland's child protection services RAATSIC received funding for the Recognised Entity service and Family Support services for Cape York and Lower Gulf. RAATSICC staff has almost tripled, with around 15 new community-based staff, ensuring local input into decisions about children. Some of these workers previously worked for their local Councils, and some are brand new.

To induct staff to their organisation and their positions, RAATSICC recently held a highly successful workshop in

Cairns. Child Protection Services workers met fellow staff from Cape York and Gulf communities plus the Mt Isa and Cairns offices. We also had welcome observers attend, like our Management Committee Member Lou Zrim; Elizabeth Bond and Marlene Bond from our sub-contracted organisation, Nai-Beguta; and Coen Justice Group co-ordinator, Ryhs Gardiner.

'The Cape York communities of Cooktown, Hopevale, Wujal Wujal, Laura, Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Aurukun, Napranum, Old Mapoon, Lockhart River, Seisia, Injino, New Mapoon, Bamaga and Umagico, Coen and the Lower Gulf communities of Normanton, Doomadgee and Mornington Island will have child protection committees. Most of these communities also have a worker to deliver the child protection services. Some of these

15 community workers have a dual role as Recognised Entity Co-ordinator and Family Support Liaison workers, while other communities have separate workers for each role.

'RAATSICC is proud and honoured to be taking this role in child protection and know we can live up to the deep and complex responsibilities involved in keeping our children and families safe whilst keeping culture strong. Our RAATSICC philosophy is that no-one knows our children and families in our remote communities better than the families themselves and we would not have progressed so well without their wisdom, resilience and direction. Home-grown workers living in their communities are the best asset to any organisation and RAATSICC will continue to build on that belief.'



Front L-R: Elizabeth Bond (New Mapoon), Marlene Bond (New Mapoon), Michelle Erbacher (Mt Isa), Joel Omeeny (Lockhart River), Mary-Lou Zrim (Coen), Rhys Gardiner (Coen). Middle L-R: Sandra Ambrum (Cairns), Jennifer Salam (Pormpuraaw), Natalie King (Normanton), Kaylene Koko (Lockhart River), Veronica Bee (Normanton), Carlene Munro (Cairns). Back L-R: Sabrina Blackman (Mt Isa), Jasmin Minniecon (Mt Isa), Ada Woolla (Aurukun), Jayde Mothe (Mt Isa), Shenane Gilbo (Kowanyama).

Queensland child protection changes and *Combined Voices* (continued from previous page)

The result was not all that we wanted as it came at a cost:

1. Funding of the new regional Indigenous Family Support Services came out of the standard annual funding for REs. That is, of the \$16M annual recurrent allocation, \$8M was allocated for the 11 regional Family Support Centres, and \$8M for REs. The number of REs was cut from 31 to 11, servicing a larger area with less staff and funding.
2. The value of the new Indigenous Family Support services is restricted by confining their clients to families with children referred by Child Safety. This means that Indigenous Family Support service providers cannot get on the front foot to stop families coming into the child protection system by doing preventive work.

Remedying these two deficiencies will be the next phase of work for the Combined Voices campaign in 2011.

On 2 Dec. 2010 Minister Phil Reeves endorsed *Together keeping*

our children safe and well, a comprehensive plan for promoting the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and reducing their over-representation within Queensland's child protection system. We trust this will soon be publicly released and placed on the Department of Communities website. Early in 2011 we will re-convene the Combined Voices steering committee to discuss this report, and to plan our ongoing campaign for reforms to the State's child protection system as it affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. We can all be encouraged and strengthened by the achievements of 2010 to go forward together in 2011.

Signed by: Dianne Harvey, QATSICPP; Gail Slocombe, PeakCare QLD; Lucas Moore, CREATE Foundation QLD; Garth Morgan, QATSIHSC

Join Combined Voices at www.qcoss.org.au

Contact: dianneharvey@qatsicpp.com.au

SNAICC recognises two QLD Children's Champions

Two long standing Queensland Aboriginal community controlled child care agencies have been defunded in the recent reform of Queensland child protection: Central Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (CQAICCA) and the Mackay Aboriginal and Islander Alternative Care & Child Protection Family Support Service.

SNAICC thanks CQAICCA Donna Kawane (formerly Klein) and Mackay AICCA Mal Walker and all their staff for their long and outstanding service on behalf of our children and families. This is a sad loss to Queensland children and family services and to SNAICC. SNAICC Here are sories from Donna and Mal about where they now find themselves.

Mal Walker

Mackay Aboriginal and Islander Alternative Care & Child Protection Family Support Service

The Mackay AICCA set up in 1993-94 and closed last September under the new departmental service restructure. Former manager Mal Walker said:

'I've been through the whole business. I grew up in the 1960s in the Palm Island boys dormitory and I've always had a real affinity with the kids. I was a founding member of our agency and I joined SNAICC around 1999 and was on the SNAICC Executive 2002-2005. At the 2004 SNAICC 20th anniversary conference I was given a plaque and a laptop for services to Queensland children. We had the highest placement in Queensland – about 67% placement with Aboriginal families.

'I believe the recent tender process was not conducive to good outcomes for our little fellas or families. People won't criticise this system, stand up for our birth right in the legislative framework, and stop kids from being removed. There's no prevention, only intervention, and they won't get the placements with Aboriginal people. "The state government said they had a team to take the people in the sector into other employment, but that never eventuated. We were told in September our service was not viable so we handed in keys, car and files back to the department. We have had no redundancy, we have heard nothing since then. I have been unemployed since then... and I think we had the best service delivery in the state...'



CQAICCA continues to provide some services from this work space..

Donna Kawane (Klein)

Central Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (CQAICCA) Rockhampton

The Rockhampton AICCA set up in 1985 and has been a core member of SNAICC over that period. CQAICCA manager Donna Kawane (formerly Klein) writes the following report following the recent changes in Queensland child protection:

Although no longer in receipt of any funding CQAICCA continue to advocate for children and families, including but not limited to:

- Lodging of formal complaints of alleged abuse by authorities in the care and protection of our children
- Advocating for their right to be safe from harm from alleged perpetrators including official authorities
- Support and advocate for better foster carer conditions

These services are all free of charge. We are receiving around three calls a week for assistance, indicating that Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection issues are not being addressed through funding allocated to the non-government sector. I continue to work on the beautiful CQAICCA bush block, which will now have to be sold.

CQAICCA still continues to operate in its 25th year. Our new address 122 West Street, Rockhampton Ph: (07) 4927 3341.

Donna has now heard she has been successful in her application for the position of Halls Creek WA Language Centre Manager. SNAICC looks forward to hearing those stories...

NSW – Healing Our Way

– cultural approaches for working with Aboriginal families and communities impacted by the trauma of violence’ conference. The event was funded by Sydney West Area Health Service, initiated by Rosie’s Place and organised by Family Worker Training and Development Programme to build capacity in Western Sydney to respond to child abuse and neglect, sexual assault and domestic violence. SNAICC ran a workshop on the *Through Young Black Eyes Workshop Kit*, and collected a few photos and stories from conference participants:



Winsome Matthews

Winsome Matthews did a great job as MC at the Healing Our Way conference. Winsome is the Senior Regional Strategies Officer at Community Services, NSW Dept Human Services and is their principle officer working

with the development of the Blacktown Aboriginal Children and Family Centre.

Winsome spoke with passion and knowledge about the booming Koorie population of Western Sydney - with 40,000 – 50,000 Koories now living in the Sydney West – Blacktown Mt Druitt region. Winsome’s mother Gloria Matthews was at the conference as an honoured Elder and to watch daughter Winsome fly. Gloria is a Yorta Yorta woman from Cummeragunja Mission; was an Aboriginal Health Worker from 1973 on; and is mother of eleven children. She’s proud of them all: ‘Lots of love and waving the wooden spoon around, that’s the way,” she said.

The Blacktown Aboriginal Children and Family Centre

Winsome shared with SNAICC News the vision statement for the new Blacktown Centre by the Blacktown Local Reference Group. It reads:

“The Aboriginal child and family centre will be a welcoming place for Aboriginal peoples and will provide and coordinate culturally relevant and safe early childhood education and care, parent and family support, and early childhood health services.”

‘Winsome will really drive this new Aboriginal child and family centre forward’ said SNAICC National Executive member Garry Matthews... (‘no relation’ he added.)

Contact: winsome.matthews@dhs.nsw.gov.au



L-R: Deb French (ECAV), Pam Greer, Vicki Thomson (Cranbrook Community Health)

Pam Greer – a living legend

Healing Our Way key note speaker Pam Greer talked about her lifetime of advocacy and work for and with woman and children. Pam now works as an Education Centre Against Violence consultant trainer. Pam recollected the many reports and conferences she had seen come and go, and she talked about the recent Youth Freedom Bus ride through NSW. ‘No more backward steps!’ she said. ‘I will do this work as long as I can remember who I am, where I am going, how to get there, and how to get home again’ she said. There was a standing ovation for Pam!



Waminda a good team

South Coast Women’s Health & Welfare Aboriginal Corp

Jasmin Whitley and Angie Lonesborough from Waminda in Nowra were two of the *Healing Our Way* conference delegates. Angie and Jasmin said: ‘Waminda was first set up in 1984 under the name of Jilamy. We have about 20 women working here. It’s great working with your own community and you get to see the difference you make. It’s a good team – all pulling together. Most of the staff are Aboriginal and we have a great board, very involved and approachable, mostly made of community Elders plus a few younger ones. Great boss too! We don’t do out-of-home-care, but we do do family support, family violence, women’s health, playgroup – lots of stuff.’ Contact: contact@waminda.org.au



Karen Barwick at HACS

Karen Barwick, a new recruit to the Hunter Aboriginal Children’s Services and Paula Hayden from Winangay Resources attended the March SNAICC National Executive meeting to present their Aboriginal Kinship Care Tool. We will cover this

new project in our next issue, meanwhile, we welcome Karen Barwick.

Karen Barwick is a Kamillaroi woman on her father’s side, originally from Narabri, northern NSW. Karen lives in Rathmines,

Lake Macquarie.

Karen is a competition salt water fisherwoman with training in adult education and social welfare. She has worked in disability NGOs and the Dept. Community Services and says some of her significant achievements have been setting up first Hunter adolescent child protection unit and being the first Aboriginal woman to go to the International Child Protection Congress in NZ (1988) to present a paper on self-determination.

Karen is now the HACS Special Projects Manager, assessing and training Aboriginal fosters carers, in charge of cultural consultation with communities, family support program, and involved with Barnardos setting up a cultural awareness for non-indigenous workers.

‘I was so excited to step aside from government department and come back to share my skills with community.’



Lyn Belyea

What makes you strong?

Four years ago a visit to Wyndham in North West WA sparked early childhood educator Lyn Belyea's interest in Aboriginal culture. Although overwhelmed by the natural beauty of the landscape she sensed a kind of homecoming. The richness of the land and people are memories that inspire her current teaching practice.

In entering her group of 3 – 4 year olds in the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2010 Dardee Boorai art competition promoting the strengths of Aboriginal culture, Lyn was astounded by all the children's natural understanding of Dreaming – both her Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Questioning the children with *What makes you strong?* was the provocation to the group. She did not anticipate the depth of knowledge and interest from the group. Transcribing the children's stories and displaying them alongside the artworks demonstrated her pride in the children's achievement. From the success of the competition, where two children were recognised with awards, Lyn plans on formatting a book to showcase to the local community the value of her mob's stories which she aims to weave into Children's Day.

Lessons of empowerment and resilience are key to her teaching philosophy, values which are the essence of the Early Years Learning Framework and the Dardee Boorai Charter of Safety and Wellbeing.

New elective in early childhood

Students enrolled in Certificate III and the Diploma of Children's Services now have the opportunity to study the elective unit 'Support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families to participate in children's services'.

The development of this nationally recognised unit occurred during 2010 and is available to Registered Training Organisations.

This unit focuses on increasing awareness of the impacts of colonisation and cross-cultural understandings. Hopefully many students in mainstream services will take up this unit and benefit from greater confidence in how to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in early years learning environments.

This unit would be advantageous for students working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. However, it is equally significant for every early childhood educator in Australia to meet standards as set in the Educators' Guide of the EYLF (2010).



Contributors to the DVD: Back L-R: Parents Leigh Ardler, Caryn Carpenter, Kay Noakes; Louissa Janes Director Lyrebird Preschool Front L-R: Sylvia Timbery-Lyrebird Preschool, Julie Smith (parent)

Preschool DVD – It's OK to Say Goodbye

23 February: Lyrebird Preschool Kindergarten in Nowra NSW launched their DVD "It's OK to Say Goodbye". Lyrebird Preschool Kindergarten is a community based not-for-profit preschool providing for children aged 3–5 years.

Their DVD focuses on the importance of Aboriginal children attending a good quality preschool program before entry to school. This project was developed by Aboriginal Community Support Worker, Sylvia Timbery and Aboriginal preschool parents. Parents, community members and workers from Nowra region services talk about the benefits that they have seen with their children in a preschool environment. The DVD was made through the Parent and Community Engagement program supported by DEEWR.

This DVD is a follow up to a picture book called *Growing up Strong* made by the preschool with the support of our Aboriginal families to show what happens in a preschool day. Families can share the book with their children in preparation for coming to preschool to show children what will happen throughout the day. Our families have found this DVD easy to relate to for parents and community members and is good both for our local Aboriginal community children and for all children from all other communities.

The DVD launch was a great success and an opportunity for the community to join together and celebrate the efforts of the Lyrebird Preschool Aboriginal families in creating an invaluable resource both for our own community and for communities all over Australia.

By Louissa Janes, Director, Lyrebird Preschool Kindergarten

View DVD: www.deewr.gov.au/Pages/Default.aspx Contact: admin@lyrebirdpreschool.com

4 August 2011
National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day

**Calling
creative kids!**

Create artwork around the theme "From small to big: growing stronger every day"

Submissions now open.
Closing date 29 April.

Understanding autism workshops for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children's centres

In 2010 SNAICC and the Parenting Research Centre formed a partnership to help Early Days, a program for parents of children with autism, reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. SNAICC undertook research including interviewing Aboriginal parents of children with autism and also ran six one day workshops called *Understanding Autism* for child care centre staff and other community members.

In 2011 this initiative has been expanded. In April, May and June, SNAICC, in partnership with the Parenting Research Centre and the Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs) will run 14 more *Understanding Autism* workshops for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's centres. Workshops will be held in each state and territory. SNAICC is delighted that Alison Wunungmurra and Jaki French have agreed to co-facilitate these workshops with PRC staff.

Jaki French is a Gomileroi woman from Moree whose experiences of bringing up her son with autism mean there is no one better able to talk about what its like to be an Aboriginal family finding out your child has autism and then dedicating every day to



L-R: Jaki French, Bek F., Alison Wunungmurra with baby Jacob & daughter Janet,

improving his life. Jaki's story *Murri* forms part of the SNAICC's 2010 research report (available on the SNAICC web site and presented at the 2010 SNAICC National Conference and is part of SNAICC's 2010 autism research report.)

Alison Wunungmurra is a Yolgnu woman from NE Arnhem, and is a mentor/ trainer from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. She brings a wealth of experience as an Aboriginal early childhood educator.

If you are interested in finding out more about these workshops please contact Bek Francis or Julie Higgins at SNAICC or contact your state or territory IPSU.

Contact: julie@snaicc.asn.au

'I'd love to see a group of strong black women standing up for our children...'

Interview with Jaki French

Jaki French is finishing her degree in Creative Writing at Batchelor College. She has written an inspirational story about her experiences bringing up her son with autism. Her story, *Murri*, is available on the SNAICC web site.

SNAICC News asked Jaki what her key messages are for our child care services when she visits for the autism workshops and she said:

The years when *Murri* was three to five were hard for us as we were just learning about autism, and because you can't get respite care, there are no inclusion support services in childcare, and children cannot be medicated until they are eight years old.

My main message to the child care services is never take a day for granted when your centre takes in a designated child. Make the most of every day, make it constructive – not a baby sitting service.

The children can purposefully learn things – whether it's what food to eat or when to go to the toilet. So make that time as productive as possible. It's a hard job, but there are ways to counteract their behaviours. Don't give up on them. If they don't want to do something, it's easy to find something else they will do.

Preschool services need to be aware of needs before the year starts so they can organise funding for support staff. My son missed 6–7 months at pre-school before they got the funding for inclusion support staff for him, and even then the assistant was not trained.

I had to continually go and suggest things for them to do, to personalise his day so he would be kept busy every hour. They needed to write up a specific curriculum for him, because what works for one child with autism will not work for another. It needs to be aligned to what the kid is attracted to, with reward systems, and an understanding of the things they are very sensitive to and what will work for him and the whole group so they will include him.

Most important – don't ever leave the mother out – always include the parents in your planning, because nobody knows the child better.

Our son is now at Moree Secondary School and things are better – the staff and head teacher are so dedicated, they are just brilliant with him, and the community services are getting together on board with the teachers.

Now I've been to a lot of conferences on autism and I'm always the only Aboriginal mother there. I think 'this can't be right!

Where's all the sista-girls who should be here with me?' Maybe the services aren't informed, or passing it on, or the mothers are in denial. I can understand people don't want their child labelled – we cop enough labels on us without our kids having this one too. But if you sit there quietly, so will everyone else. If you don't stand up for your kid, no-one else will.

When your child is first diagnosed with autism they give you the feeling there is no hope for the baby. But there are things you can do and mothers do have choices about things they can do.

I would love for all the Aboriginal mothers across the country with autistic and special needs kids to come together as a group of strong black women prepared to stick up for our kids, fight for better services for all our kids.

We have a lot of voices and things to say, but we don't know where to say it, who is interested in our stories, who will listen.

I hope though this training we can launch a Facebook site for mothers across Australia. I am thinking we could call it *Aboriginal Autism Australia* (AAA)...

Watch this space....



Aboriginal Children's Self Publishing Workshop Kit

A kit to assist in the planning and running of a Children's Self Publishing workshop in an Early Childhood service. The kit contains:

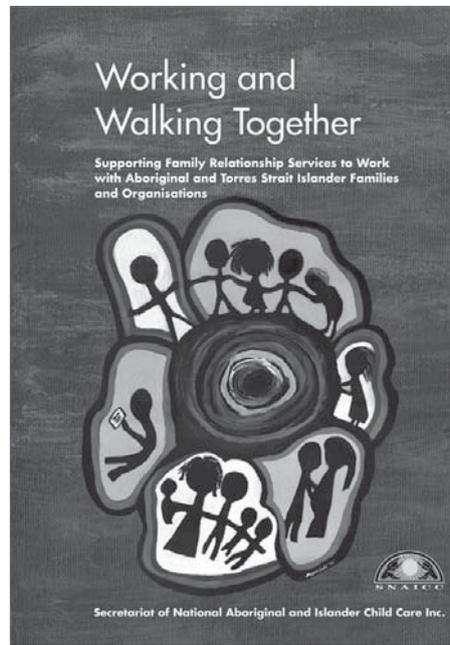
- A 30 page Children's Self Publishing guide in simple-to-follow language.
- A short DVD featuring interviews with workshop participants and demonstrating how to create simple books.
- Two examples of published books created using Self Publishing methods,
- Two 'hotdog' books.

Self Publishing methods are ideal for creating local resources and can be used for any community project.

\$65 (incl. postage & GST)

SNAICC Conference 2010 papers

Almost 1000 people gathered from all over the country at the 2010 SNAICC Conference in Alice Springs. Many of the workshop presentations are now on the SNAICC website, plus keynote addresses by Cindy Blackstock, Dorothy Scott, Karen Martin, Grant Sarra, Kerrie Tim, Joseph Sparling.



Working & Walking Together

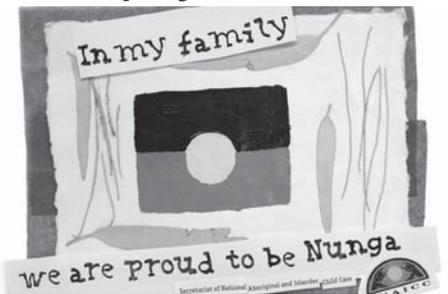
Supporting Family Relationships Services to Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families and Organisations. Full colour, 176-page A4, wiro-bound publication, featuring background information, helpful tips and principles for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and organisations, case studies, and a listing of useful resources. \$38 plus \$7 postage.

www.snaicc.asn.au



Through Young Black Eyes

Resources to help you develop child safe communities and protect children from the impact of family violence and child abuse, including a facilitators guide, information handbook, leaders guide and pamphlets. \$110 (incl. postage & GST)



In my family we are proud to be Nunga

A 16 page full colour A5 children's book Art and text created by workers from South Australian early childhood Aboriginal services participating in a SNAICC Children's Self Publishing Workshop. Order online: \$17 for ten plus \$3 postage.



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

© SNAICC 2010. Copyright for images and text published is retained by SNAICC, unless specified otherwise. Please seek permission from SNAICC before reproducing information published here.

While SNAICC makes an effort to ensure the information published herein is correct at the time of printing, readers should

contact the relevant organisations for current information concerning their activities.

Photographs herein are for illustrative purposes only. No inference is implied that those depicted are the subject of any issues raised in this newsletter. Line drawings by Nina Kalabora

Subscribe and contribute to SNAICC News

Contributions to SNAICC News are welcome. Any organisation, government department or individual may subscribe to SNAICC News and receive other information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family issues.

Subscription fees (incl GST & postage)
Government \$110

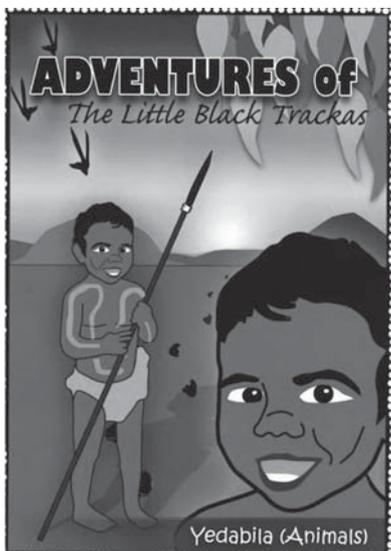
Non-government \$65
Individuals \$33

Subscriptions are paid annually on the calendar year. Members and affiliate members receive the newsletter as part of their membership.

Subscriber forms or credit card subscriber payment online www.snaicc.asn.au or ring the SNAICC finance department to organise EFTPOS

For SNAICC News inquiries contact:

Editor: Rosie Elliott
publications@snaicc.asn.au
Tel: 03 9489 8099
PO Box 1445, Fitzroy North, Victoria 3068



Little Black Trackas

Little Black Trackas is a cultural education kit for early years 0–8. It incorporates the language of the Bangerang people in Victorian Murray Goulburn area, but can be easily used as an Australia wide resource. The kit contains two books plus a CD. The first book is about Stevie D, a little black tracka who tracks animals; the second book is about Jessie-May a little black tracka who gathers insects. These beautiful A4 books contain educational and cultural concepts which support the Early Years Learning Framework of Belonging, Being and Becoming. The author and graphic artist are two young Bangerang people who aim to maintain their language while developing a resource that children love. SNAICC is assisting Neenann with their resource distribution. Order online: \$45 (incl. GST, postage & handling).

www.snaicc.asn.au/publications



Breakfast Story Book

Warburton Ranges Community is one of 11 communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands WA. The Warburton Breakfast Ladies' *Breakfast Story Book* is a vibrant classroom literacy resource developed by the women using photos of their activities and early reading words from the Salisbury List about their initiative to improve school attendance and give the kids a healthy start to the day.

SNAICC is proud to be distributing this fantastic book. A4, 20 page, hard cover, perfect bound. \$30.50 (incl. GST, postage & handling). Order on line:

www.snaicc.asn.au/publications

**SNAICC resources for
our child & family services
Order or subscribe online
www.snaicc.asn.au**

Subscribe to our free regular e-bulletin

SNAICC offer to distribute YOUR resources

Many services develop excellent local resources but do not have the time or systems to distribute them effectively. SNAICC may be able to do this for you. The SNAICC Clearinghouse role is now distributing resources developed by other services, using our own extensive resource distribution network to complement our Clearinghouse online links to you.

We provide an efficient, low-cost, reliable, consignment process to distribute your resource, via our online advertising and shopping cart facility. YOU develop and produce the resource, keep copyright, set price and determine content of the online information page hosted by SNAICC and linked to your own site. SNAICC advertises, distributes and provides some non-financial help with production. SNAICC seeks minimal handling and postage costs, with payment on a consignment basis. Priority will be given to products which fall within SNAICC's four focus areas and to SNAICC members and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations as either publishers or auspicing the publishers; or or Aboriginal self-publishers. We look forward to hearing about your ideas and resources.

Contact: rosie@snaicc.asn.au



4 August 2011 National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day

Calling creative kids!

SNAICC is calling kids, up to 12 years old, to create artworks showing us how they are growing up as a strong Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander. Selected artworks based on the theme "From small to big: growing stronger every day" will be used as part of the annual national poster for National Aboriginal & Islander Children's Day 2011 and in other SNAICC publications. Everyone who submits artwork will get a certificate and the artists selected for the poster and other material will receive a gift. Artist's names will appear wherever the artworks are used.

Submissions now open. Closing date Friday 29 April.

1. Create artwork around theme *From small to big: growing stronger every day* (Max. A3)
2. Download a submission form from the SNAICC website.
3. Fill in one submission form for each artwork and attach it to the back.
4. Post SNAICC your original artwork, with submission form attached to the back.
 - Bold and colourful works best – thick lines and strong colour – avoid pencil
 - Full and dynamic – fill the page and make it fun – avoid big empty areas
 - One side only – avoid drawing on the back of the page

Contact: nina@snaicc.asn.au.