



SNAICC Strategic Plan 2007–2009



SNAICC

SECRETARIAT OF NATIONAL ABORIGINAL
AND ISLANDER CHILD CARE INC.

**Secretariat of National Aboriginal Islander Child Care
Strategic Plan 2007–2009**



SNAICC

Secretariat of National Aboriginal Islander Child Care Inc.

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SNAICC Strategic Plan 2007–2009 is a plan by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care of its work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the services who work with them. It gives information to our members and supporters and others in the community about who we are, what we have done, and what we plan to do over the next three years

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SNAICC would like to express its gratitude to the members of the SNAICC National Executive, whose hard work and specialist knowledge and understanding of the key issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families across the country, and the community services who assist them, have both informed and led the development of this Strategic Plan.

We are also very grateful to both Kenny Bedford and Maya Havilland, who have graciously given their permission to SNAICC to use their stunning photographs for this publication. Because the mainstream media tends to publish predominantly negative stories and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, SNAICC has found it increasingly important to feature positive images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in our publications – to highlight our children’s strengths and pride in themselves and their culture.

For this reason, SNAICC would also like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s services who provided us with photographs of children and families who use their centres, which we have used in this publication. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the Undoonoo Child Care Centre in Queensland and the Aboriginal Children’s Service in Tasmania, whose contributions to SNAICC’s photographic collection have graced both the 2006 National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day poster and this publication.

SNAICC'S VISION

An Australian society in which our communities are empowered to determine their own future, where the rights of our children, young people and families are protected, our cultural identity and achievements are valued and our children and families have access to culturally appropriate high quality services.

SNAICC'S MISSION

To provide a strong voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through a national body which represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services and promotes the rights, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSES

1. To advocate for the cultural, emotional, social, spiritual, physical and economic needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
2. To pursue Indigenous community based and controlled responses to the welfare and support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
3. To promote the early childhood development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
4. To work towards the elimination of all forms of poverty and confront injustice which impacts upon the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
5. To promote public awareness and understanding of the historical and contemporary practices whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been forcibly removed from their families and the ongoing consequences of these practices.
6. To encourage, support and assist member organisations and Indigenous communities to develop independent and sustainable responses to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
7. To collaborate with other Indigenous peoples, governments, non-government agencies, the corporate sector, international organisations and others in pursuing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

8. To advocate for the right of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow up in a community free from the harmful effects of violence, child abuse and child neglect.
9. To support the development of policy positions on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and promote Indigenous perspectives on such issues to governments, other relevant bodies and the broader community.
10. To highlight and seek recognition of the positive contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people make to their communities and the nation.

SCOPE

This Plan breaks SNAICC's areas of work for the next three years into four areas of focus:

- Child and Family Well Being and Community Support and Development
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Services for Children and Families
- Social Justice and Children's Rights
- A Strong National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

The purpose of this Plan is to give information to our members and supporters and others in the community about who we are, what we have done, and what we plan to do over the next three years, in partnership with families, communities, non-government organisations and governments, to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

PRIORITY TASKS AND AREAS OF FUTURE WORK

SNAICC's 2007 to 2009 Strategic Plan includes things SNAICC will work on during the next three years, things that may be picked up by SNAICC beyond the three-year time frame of this plan or will support others to do.

SNAICC is a small organisation, and one that needs to retain the ability to respond to government initiatives and contribute our expertise to the work of other organisations when opportunities arise. This Plan has been written to allow us the scope to do this.

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS 2003–2006

1. Development of the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS)

SNAICC's 2003–2006 Strategic Plan identified the ongoing development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based children's services as a major priority. SNAICC's key achievement in relation to this priority has been the establishment of the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Service, launched by Senator Kay Patterson, Federal Minister for Family and Community Services, on 4 May 2004.

SNAICC was granted four million dollars over four years (2004/05–2007/08) to establish and manage the Resource Service, which was named the SNAICC Resources Service (SRS) in 2006.

The SRS is funded under the Australian Government's National Agenda for Early Childhood and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy. SRS projects focus on resourcing and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to deliver programs focussed on child abuse prevention, early intervention, family support and early childhood development.

2. Convening 'Our Future Generations: the National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar'

As the major event to recognise SNAICC's twentieth anniversary, SNAICC convened 'Our Future Generations: National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar' in July 2003.

The seminar brought together a total 177 Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander organisations from all states and territories as well as representatives from other community and government agencies (a total of almost 300 people).

The Seminar was an opportunity for SNAICC to gather together many of the people that have contributed to its success and for people to share ideas and hear presentations from inspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

The Seminar led to two major publications from SNAICC:

- i) *Our Future Generations – National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar Report*: a detailed report of the Seminar proceedings; and
- ii) *Seven Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families*: a policy statement, also published in poster form, based on recommendations arising from the seminar.

3. Publication of *State of Denial*

In July 2003, SNAICC published *State of Denial: the Neglect and Abuse of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory*. The report outlines serious flaws in child protection policy and practice in the Northern Territory and includes a series of reform proposals.

4. Publication of *Achieving Stable and Culturally Strong Out of Home Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*

In November 2005, SNAICC published a major policy statement outlining an approach to out-of-home care that meets children's cultural and spiritual needs as well as their need for stability and security.

5. Development of the National Children's Services Directory

SNAICC, in partnership with Infoxchange Australia, developed the on-line National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services Directory, located on the SNAICC website – www.snaicc.asn.au. The Directory enables users to locate specialist services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families through a comprehensive, up-to-date on-line database.

6. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out-of-Home Care Project

SNAICC has undertaken a project to produce for each state and territory resources that will support non-Indigenous foster carers who have Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in their care. The recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture in planning and decision making will ensure the best interests of our children are being met.

7. Children's Day

Each year on 4 August, SNAICC has run National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (NAICD) with funding and support from ATSIC (up until 2004), and from the Australian Government through the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (in 2005) and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (in 2006).

SNAICC produces posters and leaflets featuring original artwork to represent the year's Children's Day theme and distributes these materials free throughout the country.

At the local level, community-based children's services throughout the country, such as the AICCA's and MACS, have organised local celebrations and

free activities with a focus on children and families.

8. Promising Practices Case Studies

SNAICC, in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, undertook a project documenting 12 case studies on 'promising practice' in out-of-home care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The project included a series of workshops/seminars in the states and territories to promote the case studies.

9. Publication of *Footprints to Where We Are*

In September 2005 SNAICC published *Footprints To Where We Are: A Resource Manual for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services*. The manual covers child welfare, child development and governance and is part of SNAICC's capacity building work with services.

10. Indigenous Parenting Project

SNAICC carried out a parenting consultation project in partnership with the Department of Family and Community Services during the first six months of 2004 and published the report *Indigenous Parenting Project* in late 2004.

The project consulted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, carers and families to find out what additional parenting information and support governments should provide.

11. Development of Parenting and Men Posters

SNAICC, through the SNAICC Resource Service and in collaboration with the Family Action Centre of the University of Newcastle, developed a range of local and national posters to reinforce the



positive role of fathers, grandfathers, uncles, nephews, cousins, and brothers in the well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and is assisting local communities and organisations to develop their own culturally appropriate posters and materials.

12. Update of *Through Young Black Eyes*

SNAICC has fully updated and re-published *Through Young Black Eyes*, a highly successful resource to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prevent and respond to family violence, and child abuse and neglect.

13. The National Indigenous Child Care Plan

SNAICC successfully advocated for the Australian Government to develop a plan to guide the future development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care. The National Indigenous Child Care Plan was commissioned by the Department of Family and Community Services in 2005 and developed

in 2006 following an extensive consultation phase involving SNAICC and many SNAICC members and supporters throughout the country.

14. Involvement in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Working Group

SNAICC participated as a member of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group of the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council, a national policy forum involving senior government representatives from all states and territories focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare.

15. International Literature Review

SNAICC undertook this project for the Department of Human Services in Victoria to assist it in the formulation of legislation, policy and programs relating to Indigenous child welfare and protection. The University of Technology Syd-



ney (UTS) Law Faculty was contracted to conduct an international literature review and produce a report on the outcomes of the literature review suitable for publication and general distribution.

The review analyses research on the Canadian and New Zealand Indigenous child protection models and looks at the strengths and weakness of Australian state and territory child protection programs.

MONITORING

SNAICC's National Executive will at least once each year monitor progress towards achievement of the tasks and areas of work identified as priorities in this Plan.

FOCUS AREA 1

CHILD AND FAMILY WELL BEING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

To grow strong culturally and spiritually by being connected to family, community and place is the birthright of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child. In the words of the 2006 National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day theme: 'My Culture is Me: I Am Proud and Strong.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has enormous strengths and the potential to provide children with a wonderfully rich childhood, family life and cultural and spiritual life. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can be strong and powerful and provide valuable social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Family is often broadly defined within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Family members involved in children's lives, and helping to raise them, commonly include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews and members of the community who are considered to be family. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can provide connections that are a great strength for children and other family members.

When children need to be removed from home to protect their safety, their connections to their extended family and to their community and culture are weakened and sometimes broken. The destruction of families and culture that was in the past caused by the misguided and sometimes racist policies that led to the Stolen Gen-



“Children are suffering within families that are trying to cope with grief and loss, stress, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and violence. Keeping these children free from physical and psychological harm is paramount.”

erations is too often happening today due to violence, child abuse and neglect.

Children are suffering within families that are trying to cope with grief and loss, stress, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, poor housing, and violence. Keeping these children free from physical and psychological harm is paramount. Children should not be left at risk of harm (SNAICC 2005c). However, in responding to children’s needs for protection, their cultural needs must also be respected and protected.

This is a very important issue for SNAICC because the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being removed from home for child protection reasons are alarming and continuing to grow. Nationally, at 30 June 2005, there were 5,678 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, an increase of 619 since 30 June 2004 (AIHW 2005, Table 4.8). The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care at 30 June 2005 was 26.4 per 1,000 aged 0–17 years, ranging from 8.9 per 1,000 in the Northern Territory¹ to 40.7 per 1,000 in Victoria (AIHW 2005).

In all states and territories, there are higher rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care than for non-Indigenous children. Nationally Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over six times more likely to be in out-of-home care than other children. In Victoria, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care was nearly twelve times the rate for other children, and in Western Australia it was over nine times the rate (AIHW 2005, Table 4.8). As well as being more likely to be placed into out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are likely to remain in care longer.

Goal: Support the development and welfare of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by promoting healthy and strong connections to family, community and culture.

SNAICC’s role is to facilitate and promote programs and initiatives that assist families and communities to build on their strengths and care for children in ways that keep them safe, healthy and connected to culture.

Objective 1: Promote reforms in policy and practice within the early childhood and child welfare fields that acknowledge the importance of culture to building resilience and well being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Secure policy commitments from governments and other stakeholders that ensure that at the programme and service delivery level Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s connection to family, community and culture is strengthened.

¹ The reasons for the relatively low rates of child removal in the Northern Territory are more reflective of government inaction than of relatively low levels of child abuse and neglect in that jurisdiction. For further information on this topic see the SNAICC publication *State of Denial: The Neglect and Abuse of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory* by Julian Pocock.

2. Work in partnership with governments and service providers to build the cultural relevance of curricula and all programmes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood and primary and secondary school settings.
3. Advocate for payments, support and training for kinship carers that recognise that kinship care provides important cultural connections for children who need out-of-home care and which recognise that the costs of caring and the support and training needs of kinship carers are equivalent to others types of foster carer.
4. Convene SNAICC national conferences in 2007 and 2009 that include sessions promoting the importance of cultural development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
5. Pursue the development of National Standards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care that ensure they are provided with community belonging and engagement, stability, security and cultural and spiritual development relevant to their own Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.
6. Develop resources to support Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care to maintain strong family and community connections, cultural and spiritual knowledge and identity.
7. Prepare resources for use by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

agencies working with non-Indigenous carers that assist those carers meet the cultural and spiritual needs of children by keeping them connected to their family and community.

Objective 2: Support initiatives that build on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and celebrate and promote the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and culture.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Influence governments and other stakeholders to adopt a strengths-based approach in all policy and programmes relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
2. Encourage and educate mainstream children's services to provide opportunities for all children to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.
3. Facilitate and promote the development of resources that strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's cultural identity and pride.
4. Develop and promote information and resources reinforcing the positive role of men (fathers, uncles, grandfathers, nephews, cousins, brothers) in the well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
5. Develop, promote and distribute resources to assist and support children and other members of Ab-

- original and Torres Strait Islander families deal with family violence within communities.
6. Develop culturally relevant resource materials and tools to extend strengths-based family practice to assist the healthy functioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
 7. Explore the current and potential role of Aboriginal Healing Centres and traditional healing in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.
 8. Research and document the role of successful Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander men's groups, including how they can:
 - improve parenting
 - improve physical and emotional health
 - support the healthy development of children
 - reduce family violence
 - allow men to explore their roles and identity.
 9. Research and document the role of successful Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women's groups, including how they can:
 - improve parenting
 - improve physical and emotional health
 - support the healthy development of children
 - allow women to explore their roles and identity.
 10. Research and document the role of successful culturally based well being programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents, including how they can:
 - build self-worth
 - build resilience and coping mechanisms
 - improve education and employment outcomes.
 11. Develop resources to support the development of new women's groups, men's groups or youth groups if appropriate for some communities.
 12. Research and document the role and potential role of Elders in Aboriginal communities in supporting child and family well being.
 13. Convene National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day each year and:
 - broaden participation in and recognition of the day
 - produce and widely distribute the National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day poster, leaflet and activity kits each year
 - encourage mainstream children's services to participate in National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, display the posters and use resources such as *Dreaming Stories*.
 14. Facilitate the sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, document practices that are appropriate for publication and encourage acknowledgement of and respect for these practices by government and other stakeholders.

FOCUS AREA 2

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY CONTROLLED SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

a) Child and Family Welfare

History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Child and Family Welfare Services

As indicated in *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, the separation and removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their homes and families were implemented in the face of clear warnings about the potentially disastrous and tragic consequences of these policies. From as early as 1874, there were warnings about the threat to family structures and the links were clearly identified between the removal of children for domestic work and slavery, and about the lack of responsibility, authority and supervision of those involved in the forcible removal of children, and the repressive conditions in which children were held (HREOC 1997).

During the 1920s and 1930s there was a strong movement by Aboriginal people across states and territories which elevated to the political level issues and concerns





around the care and protection of their children. The two best-known early Aboriginal political organisations were the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) and the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA). It was clear to both that state and territory government ‘protection’ policies were effectively destroying Aboriginal communities and culture. In 1927 the New South Wales based Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association sent the Premier a petition which called on the Government to “restore to us that share of our country of which we should never have been deprived”, and requested that “The family life of the Aboriginal people shall be held sacred and free from invasion and that the children shall be left in the control of their parents” (VAEAI 2001).

William Cooper of the Aborigines Advancement League and Jack Patten from the Aborigines Progressive Association organised a National Day of Mourning on Australia Day in 1938. This Day of Mourning led to the establishment of the National Aboriginal & Islander Day Observance Committee. Over the years, this Committee has achieved the celebration of NAIDOC week throughout Australia (VAEAI 2001).

In 1938, Bill Ferguson and J. T. Patten signed a declaration calling for the abolition of the Aboriginal Protection Board and the “repeal of all existing legislation dealing with Aborigines”. Among other reasons for this call, they mentioned the Board’s powers to apprentice children and to “assume full control and custody of the child of any Aborigine” (Goodall 1982).

The *Bringing Them Home Report* provides evidence of Aboriginal people speaking out in other parts of the country also. For example, this interview in Perth’s *Sunday Times* in 1938 (later quoted in a speech to the Legislative Council) with Gladys Prosser, a Noongar mother, stated:

In many things the white people mean well, but they have so little understanding. My experience has convinced me that, psychologically, the Native Department is working on the wrong lines ... The same law that applies to the white race should apply to the native races in that particular. I think that is

most essential. Our native mothers have all the natural feelings of mothers the world over, and to many of them the administration of the Native Department, by men only, is stark tragedy (HREOC 2005).

In the early 1970s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities stepped up their calls for the often harsh and intrusive child welfare policies and practices of state welfare authorities to be replaced by systems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control. Specifically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities called for the establishment of national legislation to protect the rights of their children, for the recognition and funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled child welfare organisations to assume responsibility for the child protection functions carried out by state governments, and for the establishment of a national body focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) quickly established in most states and territories. These organisations soon displayed the capacity to work more effectively with families than state authorities and achieved success in reducing the rates of child removal and the development of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle under which children removed from home were to be placed with extended family and kept within their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community (Briskman 2003, HREOC 1997).

This represented a complete reversal of earlier policies of forced child removal and placement with non-Indigenous families with the intention of destroying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

SNAICC, in a submission to a 2004 Senate Inquiry into the Stolen Generations and the adequacy of the federal government's response to *Bringing Them Home*, stated that:

The challenge today is to build on the strength of AICCAs and other community based agencies to deliver better support to families and stop children being removed in the first place (SNAICC 2004a).

The Situation Today

In most states and territories there has been a failure by governments to adequately support existing AICCAs or fund new services. This failure is in part due to the lack of discussion, negotiation and agreement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and SNAICC on the one hand and state, territory and federal governments on the other over their respective roles and responsibilities in the area of child welfare and protection. In essence there is no agreement on what AICCAs should be focussed on and no recognition from government that AICCAs are an essential service that should be established, supported to develop and funded within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Since the mid 1980s the development of Aboriginal and Islander child care agencies has come to almost a complete halt. There are at present just over 30 such agencies operating in Australia, about the same number as two decades ago, and most of these are relatively small agencies with just a few staff and a restricted role focussed on placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who have already been removed from home by state welfare authorities.

“Since the mid 1980s the development of AICCAs has come to almost a complete halt. There are at present just over 30 such agencies operating in Australia, about the same number as two decades ago.”

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those in New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, have little or no access to AICCA's to assist them with parenting, family support or dealing with child protection issues and authorities. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in these communities are still subjected to interventions from state based child welfare authorities with little or no access to support and assistance from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community controlled agencies.

b) Early Childhood Services

History of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Early Childhood Services

Formal centre-based early childhood education and child care for Aboriginal children began in the early 1960s (Mellor 1990). In 1963, Save the Children Fund (STCF) opened a centre at Coffs Harbour in New South Wales and by the end of the 1970s there were 14 STCF centres in NSW and three in Victoria, each run by a non-Aboriginal teacher and an Aboriginal assistant.

The first moves towards Aboriginal managed centres began with collaborations between Aboriginal women in New South Wales and the Adult Education Department (AED) of the University of Sydney, which had received research funding from the Dutch based Bernard van Leer Foundation (Mellor 1990).

In the late 1960s the AED used this funding to sponsor Maori women who had set up their own playgroups in New Zealand to help Aboriginal women organise pre-school groups as part of Aboriginal Family Education Centres established in Box Ridge, Tabulum and Woodenbong (*Te Ao Hou*, 1967), and later in Redfern and LaProuse (*Te Ao Hou*, 1968). In Victoria, the Aboriginal Preschool Assistants Scheme was introduced in 1973 to provide Aboriginal assistants to preschools as well as advisers about the needs of Koori children.

By the 1980s early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was becoming a national issue. The National Aboriginal Education Committee noted in 1985 that the early childhood education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should strengthen their identity and the curriculum and methodology should be flexible and take account of the home life of the child (Butler 1993). Assertions such as these and the movement for self determination and community management led to the development of separate models of children's services including the Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), a 1987 initiative funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community.

The MACS model provided the scope for an Aboriginal managed service with Aboriginal staff to provide a range of programs for Aboriginal children according to community needs including long day care, occasional care, playgroups, after school care, vacation care, transport and support and information for parents. Some MACS evolved from playgroups that had been set up informally by Aboriginal women many years earlier and had gradually developed into formal centres run according to the MACS model.

The Situation Today

From the start inadequate funding, strict licensing requirements and lack of trained staff have meant that there was often a large gap between the ideal of the MACS model and what could actually be achieved. This remains the situation today. Much work remains to be done before MACS and similar models of multi-functional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services can achieve their potential and before all Aboriginal communities have a MACS or similar service to meet their early childhood and family support needs.

Goal: To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families by ensuring they have access to effective and culturally strong children's and family services.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families should have access to an AICCA or similar child and family welfare agency support and assist them in the care of their children and a MACS or similar model of children's service to meet their child care, child development and family support needs, particularly during their children's early years. The ongoing development of AICCAs, MACS and similar models of service that provide culturally appropriate services that build on families' strengths and capacities is a major goal for SNAICC.

Objective 1: Pursue the further development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander controlled children's and family services working in the areas of child and family welfare including child protection, out-of-home care, family support, parenting assistance and family reunification.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Develop an evidence base to advocate strongly to government that community controlled Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander services are critical ways of providing child and family welfare services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
2. Facilitate and maintain a strong dialogue between SNAICC, its members and supporters and state and territory governments and the Australian Government in relation to the optimal roles and responsibilities of each in the policy area of child welfare.
3. Advocate for and support a broader family support role for all Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services with a focus on early intervention, prevention of family breakdown, and family reunification.
4. Assist SNAICC child and family welfare members, where requested, to broaden their services and programme base and strengthen their governance and organisational development, including their capacity for communication and networking.
5. Call for a process to identify which Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities are most likely to benefit from the development of a new or expanded Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency.
6. Support SNAICC members and lo-

cal communities in states and territories to develop proposals for the expansion of the current roles, functions and programmes.

7. Document and highlight examples of good practice in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare for other services and communities to learn from and replicate as appropriate.
8. Document and highlight models of close linkages and mutually beneficial co-operation between early childhood and child and family welfare services within communities.
9. Convene SNAICC national conferences in 2007 and 2009 which include sessions for the managers and staff of AICCA's and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services for raising issues, information sharing, training and generating ideas.
10. Advocate for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services National Workforce Development Strategy which identifies and responds to the workforce needs of child and family welfare (and early childhood) services in a culturally appropriate way.
11. Develop culturally relevant tools and systems for use within the child protection system in areas such as case management and family decision-making.
12. Identify, collect and make available through the SNAICC Resource Service Clearinghouse resources and material for child welfare (and

early childhood) organisations to learn from and utilise within their own practice.

13. Advocate for consistent collection and analysis of child protection data across states and territories so that Aboriginal agencies with a role in child protection have access to details of how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in the system, where they are placed, how the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle has been applied, and who is providing support to the children.
14. Facilitate the development of a nationally consistent minimum-funding model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare services.

Objective 2: Pursue the further development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander controlled children's and family services working in the areas of services for children and families including early childhood developmental programs, child care, playgroups, family support, parenting assistance and programs for school-aged children.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Educate the members of influential early childhood forums including the Children's Services Sub Committee about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and improve their understanding of the need to expand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care centres across the states and territories.

2. Prepare annual submissions from SNAICC to the Federal Budget process on the expansion of the number and scope of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services.
3. Secure good outcomes from the National Indigenous Child Care Plan including:
 - an expansion in the number and scope of Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services
 - adequate support for communities with little or no service provision to develop new or expand existing child care services as appropriate
 - all services, including JET crèches, to have available quality resource materials, and professional and management support through Indigenous Professional Support Units (IPSUs) in each state and territory.
4. Document and highlight examples of good practice in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services for communities to learn from and replicate as appropriate.
5. Support SNAICC early childhood members to broaden their services and program base and strengthen their governance and organisational development, including their capacity for communication and networking.
6. Advocate for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services National Workforce Development Strategy which identifies and responds to the workforce needs of early childhood services (and child and family welfare services) in a culturally appropriate way.
7. Convene SNAICC national conferences in 2007 and 2009 which include sessions for the directors and staff of MACS and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services for raising issues, information sharing, training and generating ideas.
8. Facilitate the development of resources to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services to identify and respond to children and families that have been affected by substance abuse (including foetal alcohol syndrome) and family violence.
9. Identify, collect and make available resources and material for early childhood (and child welfare) organisations to learn from and utilise within their own practice.



FOCUS AREA 3

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

HISTORY AND ISSUES

SNAICC has throughout its history maintained a broad agenda and spoken out on a range of national issues including national land rights legislation, native title, child poverty, the need for a National Apology and compensation for the Stolen Generations and the application of United Nations human rights conventions within Australia such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the same rights as other Australian children, including the right to be safe, the right to health care, the right to education etc. They also have unique rights within Australia as the Indigenous people of this land. The birthright that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is privileged to inherit is a unique cultural and spiritual heritage that stretches back over 40,000 years. The Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child can only inherit their culture and allow their spirituality to emerge through the experience of culture, connection to family, community and place and experiencing the spiritual awareness that evolves from these experiences and connections.

All the key portfolio areas of government such as health, education, community services, employment, income support and law and justice share the responsibility with SNAICC for making sure that, whatever their family circumstances, no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is denied this birthright. Responding to the needs of children cannot occur unless there is strong collaboration between different areas of government and across a range of non-government organisations.



Goal: To increase awareness, understanding and protection of the needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families within government and other decision and policy making forums relevant to children and within the broader Australian community.

The Australian Government and Australian society as a whole are not adequately aware of the daily abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights, and too often government responses to rights violations are inadequate, sometimes shamefully so. SNAICC's dual role is to improve how well our governments meet the needs and protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and work to build Australian community supportive for – and indeed demand for – government action in this area.

Objective 1. Promote public awareness of breaches of children's rights and use this work to promote a broader understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights and social justice at the national and international levels.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Produce and publish information on selected issues relating to the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (including child abuse and neglect, the impact on children of substance abuse, child poverty, family violence and access to early childhood education) for broad public distribution.
2. Include information on issues relating to the needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the SNAICC newsletter and on the SNAICC website, including through the SNAICC Resource Service components on SNAICC's website.
3. Convene SNAICC national conferences in 2007 and 2009 that include sessions on social justice issues and the needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
4. Contribute to the work of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Non Government Organisations Working Group.
5. Contribute support to the Draft United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Objective 2. Strengthen the capacity of organisations to advocate for social justice and human rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Provide support, information and education to SNAICC members and others

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the same rights as other Australian children. They also have unique rights within Australia as the Indigenous people of this land.”



about:

- Australian human rights forums and mechanisms
- the United Nations system of human rights including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and
- their potential impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

2. Develop and strengthen relationships and partnerships, and possibly reciprocal membership arrangements, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in the health, education and law and justice sectors.
3. Attract additional project and core resources for policy development and advocacy activities in the areas of child welfare, early childhood development and other policy priorities.
4. Develop a National Indigenous Children's Rights Unit within SNAICC with identified staffing and other resources.
5. Broaden SNAICC's membership base and the network of Indigenous organisations we draw upon for policy advice and input in order to maintain a broader policy agenda. Importantly this will include seeking closer and more formal working relationships with a range of other national Indigenous peak bodies.
6. Work with our existing members to assist them to expand their role and attract new areas of membership.
7. Develop educational resources about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's rights.

FOCUS AREA 4

A STRONG NATIONAL PEAK BODY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

History of SNAICC

2006 marked the twenty-fifth year since SNAICC was first established in 1981. In 1982 we elected our first National Executive and in 1983 opened a national office after receiving Australian Government funding support.

While concern with child protection and child welfare led to the development of SNAICC's oldest members, the Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, SNAICC was not developed to focus merely on child protection or welfare.

In 1998 SNAICC set out to broaden its membership base to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations working in the field of early childhood education and child care.

SNAICC Today

By 2004 SNAICC had grown to be an organisation with a network and subscriber list of over 1400 community groups, mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, but also significant numbers of non-Indigenous community based services and individu-



als with an interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

SNAICC is governed by a National Executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from our members representing both child and family welfare services and early childhood services from all states and territories and operates from an office located in Melbourne with funding provided by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

SNAICC operates from a diverse membership base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based family and children's services. These include child and family welfare services, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), JET crèches, playgroups and mobile services, women's services, family support services, foster care agencies, link-up and family reunification services, family group homes, Indigenous child care centres, preschools, parenting programs, early childhood education services, family and domestic violence services and services for young people at risk.

A major change in 2004 was the announcement of an additional four million dollars over four years (2004/05–2007/08) under the Australian Government's National Agenda for Early Childhood and Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to establish and manage the National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Service, now called the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS). SRS projects focus on resourcing and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services to deliver programmes focussed on child abuse prevention, early intervention, family support and early childhood development.

This funding increase has significantly boosted SNAICC's capacity and shifted the organisation from the small group of one to three people that it was for its first twenty years to an organisation that has quickly grown to fourteen full- and part-time staff and, excitingly, the capacity to turn some of its long held plans into reality.

Goal: To strengthen SNAICC as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the capacity to resource and support communities and services to work in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC will seek to become a better known and more effective peak body and resource service in all aspects of its operations.

Objective 1: Diversify and build SNAICC's financial and non-financial resources including its members, funding sources, and partnerships.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Develop an evidence base for the ongoing viability and sustainability of the SNAICC Resource Service and secure its ongoing funding by federal, state and territory governments.
2. Increase SNAICC's profile nationally and improve awareness of all its activities.

“The funding increase has significantly boosted SNAICC's capacity, including its capacity to turn some of its long held plans into reality”

3. Provide advice to our members on how to form good partnerships with government, other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander agencies and mainstream agencies.
4. Increase SNAICC's research and policy capacity by continuing to improve the research and policy skills of our staff and attracting additional core funding to recruit additional skilled research and policy staff.
5. Diversify SNAICC's funding base by attracting funds from state and territory governments, philanthropic trusts and the private sector and by pursuing tax deductible gift status.
6. Continue the process of improving the SNAICC newsletter by expanding the range of contributors and coverage of issues.
7. Promote the SNAICC and SNAICC Resource Service websites, expand their content, users and contributors and continue to provide regular updates of news and events through the sites.
8. Improve the capacity of SNAICC members to engage with governments at all levels, to influence legislation, policy and programme development and thereby secure better outcomes for the children and families in their communities.
9. Develop a network of research partners with expertise relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Objective 2: Ensure SNAICC remains effectively governed and well managed and provides a rewarding and positive environment for its members, volunteers, office holders and staff.

Priority Tasks and Areas of Future Work

1. Ensure SNAICC National Executive members are inducted and supported to understand their role and participate in SNAICC's decision making.
2. Improve the capacity of SNAICC's Executive and members to contribute to SNAICC's policy development and other SNAICC activities and programmes.
3. Support SNAICC members from each state and territory to network with each other across their state or territory and nationally.
4. Ensure the staff at SNAICC have the resources, training and support they need to undertake their work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with the motivation, expertise and commitment that their roles require.



PARTNERSHIPS

SNAICC's approach is to build on the strengths of families and communities and work in partnership with them for the benefit of children.

SNAICC seeks to work constructively with governments and others to develop legislation, policies programmes and services that will make a real difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families today and in the future.

Responsibility for children's programmes is split between the federal government and state and territory governments and there are a large number of other national and state bodies with a role in this policy area. SNAICC will collaborate and work with these organisations to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are recognised and responded to appropriately.

In order to succeed, SNAICC will draw upon the work and expertise of a range of organisations and individuals and contribute our expertise to the work of others for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Those with whom SNAICC will work collaboratively and in partnership include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities
- SNAICC members and supporters in states and territories
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations with a role or potential role in child welfare including Aboriginal health and medical services
- The Australian Government and its various departments and advisory

mechanisms acting in the areas of child welfare and early childhood development, primarily the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA)

- Ministerial Councils for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Community Services and relevant working groups
- State and territory government departments responsible for child and family welfare or early childhood services
- Non-Indigenous community organisations with a role or potential role in child welfare including service providers and peak bodies
- National Children's Services Forum
- Australian Early Childhood Association
- Commonwealth Child Care Reference Group
- Australian Council for Children and Parenting
- Infoxchange Australia
- State and national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education peak bodies, for example VAEAI (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc.) and Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups in states and territories
- Major centres of expertise such as the Centre for Community Child Health, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD), Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre, Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (IATSIS) and research centres within universities and other tertiary institutions
- Other national organisations such

as NACCHO (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation), NAJAC (National Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee) and NAILS (National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Secretariat)

- Torres Strait Islander Regional Authority and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board
- Other national and international organisations with a significant role in public policy development and children's rights including ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service), Families Australia, NAPCAN (National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), World Vision, Save the Children Fund and Defence for Children International (DCI).



EXPLANATION OF KEY TERMS

AICCAs: AICCAs are Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, which provide a range of child and family welfare services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including recruitment and support of foster carers, case management services for children in out-of-home care, family group homes and family support services.

Capacity Building: is a strategic approach to increasing the infrastructure and abilities of people on the ground to deliver their organisation's services.

Community Controlled: Community controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are generally managed through an elected Board of Management and an appointed chief executive officer (or equivalent).

This arrangement allows the local community (through the Board) to decide on the priorities, policies, management structure, staff and service profile of the service within government funding guidelines (Shannon, Carson, Atkinson 2006).

Culture: Culture is the total ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is passed on from one generation to the next. Culture is made up of such things as arts, rituals, performances, sacred and significant sites and objects (Australian Museum Online 2004).

Culturally Appropriate: Culturally appropriate services are services that respect and take into account a person's cultural background and cultural needs.

Culturally Strong: Culturally strong services are those that provide strong connections to culture.

FaCSIA: FaCSIA is the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Following the changes announced by the Prime Minister in January 2006, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) became part of the FaCSIA portfolio, formerly the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). FaCSIA is responsible for social policies and support affecting Australian society and the living standards of Australian families. Most of the funding SNAICC receives is from FaCSIA.

Family: Family is the cornerstone of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and spirituality. Family members involved in children's lives and helping to raise them commonly include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and members of the community who are considered to be family (SNAICC 2005c).

Family Violence: This is a term broadly equivalent to the term 'domestic violence'. It includes physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse and covers child abuse and neglect; Elder abuse and neglect; intimate partner abuse (partner/spousal abuse); sibling violence and violence towards parents and other members of the family.

MACS: MACS are Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services services first funded by the federal government in 1997 to provide a range of programmes for Aboriginal children according to community needs, including long day care, occasional care, playgroups, after school care, vacation care, trans-

port and support and information for parents.

SRS: The SRS is the SNAICC Resource Service, first funded by the federal government in 2004. The SRS resources and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to deliver programmes focussed on child abuse prevention, early intervention, family support and early childhood development.

Out-of-home Care: Out-of-home Care refers to placement of a child by the state in the home of a carer who is reimbursed for the cost of the care of the child. It includes the child living in foster care, living with a relative or kin (kinship care) or living in private board.

Out-of-home care also refers to placement in family group homes which are run like family homes with resident substitute parents and placements in residential care which are facilities whose purpose is to provide placements for children and where there are paid staff (AIHW 2005, p. 78).

SNAICC Members and Supporters: SNAICC members and supporters are organisations that participate in SNAICC activities, subscribe to SNAICC newsletters or have formally taken out full or associate membership of SNAICC.

Social Justice: Being entitled to the same rights and services as all other citizens (Australian Museum Online).

Strengths-Based Approach: A strengths-based approach operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. Workers assist clients to define goals, and identify and mobilise strengths and resources.

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