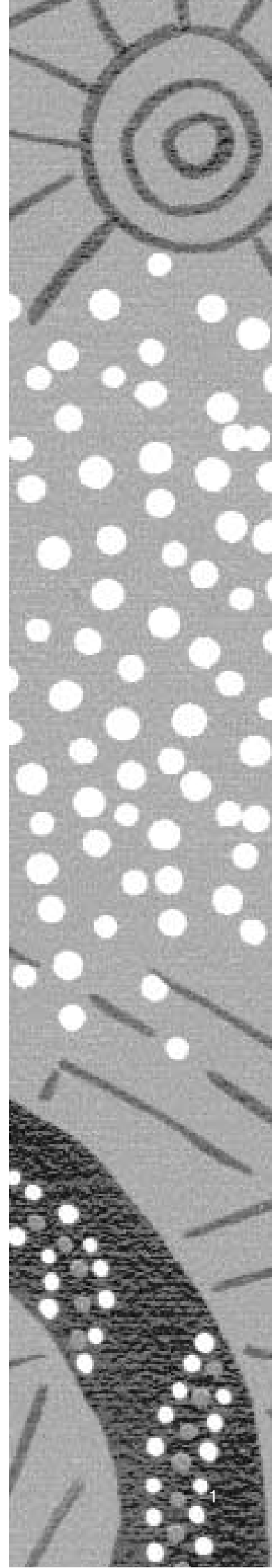


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1. Background on SNAICC

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAICC, is the national non government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC was formally established in 1981 after the creation of such a body was proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at, " The First Aboriginal Child Survival Seminar" held in Melbourne in 1979. The organisation elected its first national executive in 1982 and has received Federal Government funding support from 1983.

SNAICC operates from a membership base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based child care agencies, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services, family support services, foster care agencies, link up and family reunification services, family group homes, community groups and voluntary associations, long day care child care services, pre schools, early childhood education services and services for young people at risk.

In addition to these members SNAICC has a network and subscriber list of over 800 community groups, mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, but also significant numbers of non Indigenous community based services and individuals 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 and operates from an office located in Melbourne with two part time staff.

Key milestones in SNAICC's commitment to serving the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have included:

- Bringing to national prominence the story of the 'Stolen Generations' when in 1991 SNAICC was the first national Indigenous organisation to call for a national inquiry into the 'Stolen Generations'
- Production of *Through Black Eyes - Family Violence Resource Handbook* in 1991 and 1992;
- Development of National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, NAICD, (August 4th each year), as a major annual event celebrated by communities throughout Australia.
- Representing the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1998 and 2000
- Research and production of the 'Proposed Plan of Action for Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities' in 1996
- Convening the second National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Survival conference in June 1997.
- Continuing membership of the Australian Council for Children and Parenting following our participation in the National Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse
- Membership of the Federal Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Family Violence Taskforce
- Compilation of a national report on the operation of the 37 Commonwealth funded Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, for the Department of Family and Community Services.
- Reaching agreement with the ATSIC Board of Commissioners on the need for the development by ATSIC of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's, youth and family policy.
- Publication in 2001 of *Through Young Black Eyes*, a national resource booklet and community elders guide responding to issues of family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

1998 NAICD POSTER

This photo was featured on the first ever NAICD poster in 1998, "Return our Kids and Stop the Cultural Genocide". It highlights many of the key elements that have been part of NAICD since. The participation of children, the ongoing struggle to keep children and families together, the Aboriginal flag, the importance of culture and the support of elders. The photograph is an important icon in the history of SNAICC and marked SNAICC's protest at the 1998 Bicentenary celebrations.





2. National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, August 4th

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, (NAICD), is an annual event celebrated on August 4th each year having been established by SNAICC in 1988.

The aim of NAICD is to demonstrate how important children are to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Through focussing on a different theme each year NAICD draws attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and major issues SNAICC is pursuing on their behalf.

With funding and support from ATSIC SNAICC produces posters featuring original artwork to represent the theme with posters distributed free by SNAICC throughout the country. At the local level community based children's services throughout the country such as the AICCA's and MACS organise local celebrations and free activities with a focus on children and families.

Previous NAICD Themes

Since 1998 NAICD has focussed on themes ranging from child poverty, the forced removal of children from families, access to education, cultural pride and inheritance, the importance of elders in the lives of children and investing in a better future for children.

In 1991 NAICD focussed on the issue of the Stolen Generations and demanded a national inquiry into the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. Through NAICD SNAICC became the first national organisation to call for such an inquiry and campaigned tirelessly until the Federal Government announced in 1995 that an inquiry would be held.

The final report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, HREOC, inquiry *Bringing Them Home* placed the issue of the Stolen Generations at the centre of the reconciliation process. Ten years after SNAICC first called for the inquiry on NAICD 1991 the issue of the Stolen Generations has gone from being known by very few Australians to being known by literally all Australians.

Not satisfied that the issues had merely been raised on NAICD in 1997 SNAICC demanded a full and proper response to the 'Bringing Them Home' report. This included reparation for those directly affected and a complete overhaul of the current child protection systems which continue to remove Indigenous children at over 6 times the rate of other Australian children.

***"We are watching and learning from you -
make us proud of all you do"***

This was the theme for 2001 and it challenges individuals, organisations and governments to remember that children learn from observing their behaviour. Too often children witness behaviour which carries messages of violence, neglect and indifference instead of love, respect, reconciliation, support and encouragement.

SNAICC challenges all organisations and individuals to think about the example they set for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Children who can take pride in the people around them will grow up to respect their elders, value their cultural heritage and strengthen their communities.

3. A National Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to face an uncertain and difficult future.

As the national peak body which seeks to represent their interests SNAICC has identified a number of key issues for attention at the national level. These issues have been communicated to all the major political parties. SNAICC is also working with ATSIC and a range of organisations at the community, state, national and international levels to promote understanding of and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC has advocated that the Federal Government pledge their support for:

1. Making a formal apology to the Stolen Generations through the Federal Parliament
2. Developing a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family policy between Indigenous organisations, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories which aims to:
 - Reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children still being removed from home for child welfare and poverty related reasons
 - Expand the availability of AICGAs and Family Support Services to ensure all Indigenous communities can access holistic family support
 - Outline targets for reducing the current rates of child removal by State/Territory welfare authorities
 - Establishes national benchmarks for all government services at all levels to ensure planning takes account of the high proportion of Indigenous people under the age of 30 ie 70%
3. Implementing recommendations from *Bringing Them Home* including those in relation to National Standards legislation and National Framework legislation, to cover:
 - reform of the current systems of child protection to effectively provide for self determination and the transfer of child

protection responsibilities to accredited community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

- minimum standards for the care, protection and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in need of care
 - juvenile justice administration and issues relating to detention and sentencing
 - abolishing mandatory sentencing in the NT and WA,
4. Funding the Federal Government commissioned National Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect developed by SNAICC and the Commonwealth in 1996
 5. Establishing and funding a National Indigenous Youth Strategy as recommended by The Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody with a key focus on community involvement and education and employment for young people at risk of leaving school with no opportunity to work or study.
 6. Providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with improved access to family support services to prevent family breakdown and reduce the number of Indigenous children removed from their families by State Welfare authorities
 7. Making a national commitment to early childhood development by expanding the number and operation of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS, and other early childhood services to ensure all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have access to quality child care and preschool education.
 8. Providing additional funding to ATSIC to enable ATSIC to reinstate its Community and Youth Support Program which was completely cut following government budget cuts imposed on ATSIC in 1996.



4. Major issues impacting upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

BACKGROUND

The issue of Aboriginal children's rights was prominent in the demands of the first Aboriginal political organisations in the nineteen-twenties.

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." ¹

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". Amongst other reasons for this call, they mentioned the Boards' powers to apprentice children and to "assume full control and custody of the child of any Aborigine". ²

The story of the Stolen Generation is far from over as the SNAICC's submission to the 2000 Senate Inquiry into the Stolen Generations and the adequacy of the Federal Government's response to *Bringing Them Home* highlighted. The removal of Indigenous children from their families continues at an alarming rate with many still being placed with non Indigenous foster families.

"The grief and anguish of being removed as a child is perhaps only matched by the grief and anguish of then having your own children removed. Yet all too often this is the way in which we as a nation respond to the Stolen Generations; we take their children away too." ³

Pursuing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is SNAICC's core mission and as highlighted below there is much to be done.

FAMILY SEPARATIONS AND THE ONGOING REMOVAL OF CHILDREN

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, Indigenous children are still over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other Australian children. The key causes the AIHW note include:

- higher rates of poverty
- inadequate housing and living conditions
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- cultural differences in child rearing practices, and
- a lack of access to support services.⁴

The rates of NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on care and protection orders are 22.3 per 1000 at June 30 1998 compared to 3.1 per 1000 for all children.⁵

In relation to out of home care the AIHW note that Victoria (30.7), ACT (24.4) and NSW (21.5) had the highest rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children per 1000 in out of home care. The rate for all children in out of home care across Australia was only 3.1 per 1000.⁶

Put another way SNAICC estimates in NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 28% of all children in the care and protection system despite making less than 2% of the total population of children aged 0 - 17 in NSW. In Victoria the figures are Indigenous children comprise 20% of children in care and less than 1% of the population aged 0 - 17.

CHILD ABUSE AND CHILD NEGLECT

Too often child abuse and child neglect are discussed and reported upon in the media and elsewhere as though they are the same issue - they are not.

Child abuse typically involves the wilful and deliberate harming of children albeit at the hands of

perpetrators who may have themselves been victims of abuse, been separated from family and suffered great emotional trauma in their own lives.

Child neglect arises typically where parents and families are unable - but not necessarily unwilling - to provide for their children in a material sense due to family poverty, unemployment, poor housing and family stress.

The major contributor to the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system and out of home care is child neglect - not child abuse. In fact an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child who has been removed from home is less likely to have been abused than a non Aboriginal child.

The importance of looking at the issues of child abuse and child neglect as a separate issues is that it highlights the impoverished and disadvantaged position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Poverty and disadvantage is the major cause of child removal - not inappropriate parenting.

Rather than supporting families in poverty to care for their children all too often the response of government to family poverty within Indigenous communities is to remove the children.

This is an intolerable, unjust and ineffective way to respond to child neglect within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is a response that blames Indigenous families for entrenched societal problems such as poverty and unemployment.

PREVENTING THE REMOVAL OF CHILDREN - FROM FAMILY SEPARATION TO FAMILY SUPPORT

Currently no government in Australia with a role in child welfare has a specific policy objective to lower the rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed from their families for welfare related reasons. This is despite the over representation of Indigenous children in the care and protection system, the negative impact of child removal upon children and their families and the long terms costs to government and the community.

Funding in relation to child welfare is mainly directed towards the removal and placement of children once family breakdown has occurred rather than towards family support to prevent the need for children to be removed. Too little attention is directed towards preventing the need for children to be removed in the first place.

SNAICC considers that Governments at all levels, including the Commonwealth, must commit to this most basic of policy objectives - to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care and protection system.

The Commonwealth, States and Territories must commit to funding AICCAs in accordance with a holistic service model that aims to deliver the highest standard of family support. The current practice of funding agencies to work after family separation has occurred is self defeating.

FUNDING ADDITIONAL AICCAs AND INDIGENOUS FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Over the past 20 years there has been a substantial growth in the size, number and capacity of child and family welfare services working with non Indigenous families. Church based agencies, large State funded non government organisations as well as smaller local family support services have all expanded throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Agencies such as Anglicare, Barnardos and Centacare have grown to become major recipients of Government funding and major providers of family welfare services. SNAICC does not oppose this development.

In stark contrast however Australia's existing AICCAs, which service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, have been largely left behind, neglected and grossly under funded.

In Queensland it has been noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children comprise less than 5% of the States' children aged between 0–17 but make up 25% of children in care. Despite this only 10% of total funding for alternative care in Queensland is allocated to Indigenous agencies for the support of these children and families.⁷ Since 1987 the Commonwealth under both Labor and the Coalition has refused to provide the AICCAs with any additional funds with the

Commonwealth currently providing only part funding to 11 services.

AICCAs are unable to work across all communities and for more than two decades the number and scope of AICCAs has remained relatively stagnant. Additional services are required to ensure that all Indigenous communities can access AICCAs and family support services to assist them and to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families together.

SNAICC believes that the Commonwealth, States and Territories need to work with SNAICC to establish a national commitment to develop additional AICCAs and other accessible family support services for all Indigenous communities. Part of that commitment should include agreeing on the respective role of each level of government and ensuring existing services are funded to provide holistic support to families - not simply assist in the placement of children once State welfare departments have removed them.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR THE CARE, PROTECTION, PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

The key policy governing the placement of Indigenous children, the Indigenous Child Placement Principle, ICPP, was campaigned for by the AICCAs and is based on the principle of self-determination.

Under the ICPP any Indigenous child who is removed from home under child protection legislation should be placed with other family members, extended family, within the local Indigenous community, another Indigenous community where culturally appropriate or as a last resort with non Indigenous carers. The aim of the ICPP is to ensure children retain and develop their distinct Indigenous cultural identity.

However despite the acceptance of the Indigenous Child Placement Principle by all State and Territory governments approximately 25% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still placed with non Aboriginal foster parents.⁸

The ongoing over representation of Indigenous children in substitute care and the continuing

practice of placing children with non Indigenous foster constitutes a serious risk to the cultural identity Indigenous children in Australia. In particular it places at risk their right to grow up in a community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion and use their own language.

National legislation which outlines National standards for the proper care and protection of Indigenous children and which incorporates the ICPP is urgently needed. Such standards would assist in improving the quality of care for children in the protective system, ensure that States and Territories are accountable for implementing the ICPP and that sufficient funding is provided for child protection in order to lift standards of care.

ACCESS TO PRE SCHOOL SERVICES & CHILD CARE

The importance of the first three years of a child's life and of early childhood development has been widely recognised. Pre schools, kindergartens, and child care centres play a critical role in providing children with the best possible start in life. Such services assist families prepare children for primary school as well as assisting with their general health and emotional development.

Access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to pre school services and support falls well behind that of the rest of the Australian community. Of even greater concern is the fact that access by Indigenous children to these services is declining.

Access to pre school education

The Howard Government's National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy recognises that, "The number of Indigenous pre-school aged children rose dramatically between 1991 and 1996. However at the same time, the number in pre school stayed roughly the same at around 8,000. Thus the participation rate dropped from almost 53% to around 41% in 1996, a substantial reduction.." ⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are the only group in the Australia for whom participation in

pre school education is falling.

Whilst the value of pre school education may be widely recognised too little is being done to expand pre school services for Indigenous children.

It is clear to SNAICC that the early childhood development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within in Australia are being inadequately addressed.

Unless this situation is reversed many more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will be disadvantaged at the point of commencing primary school and these children risk being left behind to become the unemployed, marginalised and impoverished teenagers in the next decade.

Access to child care

In 2000 SNAICC prepared a national report on the operation of the existing 37 Commonwealth funded Multi Functional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACS.

Currently less than 4,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 6 weeks to 5 are participating in centre based child care throughout Australia. Just under half of these children are enrolled in one of the 37 MACS centres. Whilst Indigenous children comprise 4.25% of all children aged 0 - 12 they make up only 1.5% of the children aged 0 -12 in Commonwealth funded child care. ¹⁰

The SNAICC report found that the 37 MACS had been very successful in providing high quality long day care services for Indigenous children and families. At the same time it was noted that the current funding arrangements often restricted their activities when the intention, as their name indicates, was for the services to be Multifunctional.

It also noted that:

- MACS provide an effective service model for the delivery of high quality child care, kindergarten and pre school programs
- that current services are unable to meet demand as the MACS funding program is effectively capped
- children who had regularly attended a MACS service were able to cope with the demands of

primary school more easily than other Indigenous children

- services required urgent assistance with capital equipment and facilities, (only one of the 37 has email access)
- that the age structure of the Indigenous population meant that participation in child care and pre school education was currently declining as the growth in the population rapidly outstripped the number of places

There has been no increase in the number of MACS services for over ten years and SNAICC has identified the following major Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population centres which could benefit from the provision of a MACS centre.

There are over 40 key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population centres with a population of over 1,500 people with no existing MACS service.

Major rural population centres which should be priorities for a MACS centre include Walgett, Bourke, Broken Hill, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Mooree, Orange, Ballarat, Bendigo, Swan Hill, Mildura, Wodonga, Warrnambool, Cairns, Innisfail, Mt Isa, Hopevale, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, Thursday Island, Townsville, MacKay, Thuringowa,

- 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of five whilst only 7% of the whole population is under the age of five.

Other statistics include:

- 28% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 10
- 40% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 15
- 68% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under the age of 30

Hervey Bay, Port Augusta, Bunbury, Port Headland, Derby, Kalgoorlie and Geraldton.

Major urban/metropolitan centres which should be priorities for a MACS centre would include Fairfield and Liverpool (Sydney), Canberra, (ACT), Dandenong and Healesville, (Melbourne), Ipswich, Gold Coast, Logan, (Brisbane), Salisbury, Noarlunga and Hindmarsh, (Adelaide).

In addition to centre based care which can be provided through MACS centres additional mobiles services are also required for isolated and remote communities throughout Australia.

IMPACT OF THE AGE STRUCTURE OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION ON GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY

There is a need for the implications of the age structure of the Indigenous population to be taken into account by all governments at all levels. It is already clear in areas such as child care and pre school education that the existing services cannot keep pace with the increasing number of Indigenous children in Australia.

Jonas notes that the age structure is, " typical of an underdeveloped country with more children and young people and fewer old people."

Mick Dodson, the first HREOC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, commented in 1996 that incarceration rates need to be considered with an awareness of the age structure of the Indigenous population in Australia.

"This, (the age structure), has enormous consequences for the future of our people. Combined with the over representation of our young people in detention it means that by the year 2011 there will be a 44% increase in the number of our kids in detention." ¹¹

This is a stark and frightening outcome: a 44% increase in the number of young Indigenous people imprisoned even if incarceration rates are held at 1996 levels.

Anticipated increase in number of Indigenous children aged 0 - 17 in Out of Home care between 2001 and 2010

State/ Territory	Rate per 1,000 in Out of Home Care	Number In Out of Home Care at June 30th 2000	Expected Numbers by 2010
NSW	32.9	1815	2,500
VIC	27.5	297	450
QLD	11.0	592	840
WA	15.4	420	600
SA	19.5	211	300
TAS	5.1	38	55
ACT	18.9	29	50
NT	3.9	94	130
AUSTRALIA	18.3	3496	4950

Source for rates: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; Child Protection Report 1999/00. AIHW cat no CWS 13. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 2001.

ESCALATING NUMBERS OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

Unless there is a dramatic decline in the rate of child removal per 1,000 then there will be a dramatic increase in the total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in need of substitute care across the country.

In 1996 when Dodson spoke of the crisis in juvenile justice young Indigenous people aged 10 - 17 in NSW were removed from home through the child welfare system at four times the rate at which they were removed by the juvenile justice system , (7.45 per 1,000 compared to 29.2 per 1,000) (Dodson, 1996).

If the number of Indigenous children in care in NSW stays at the current rate of 29.2 per 1,000, the age structure of the population means that the total number of Indigenous children in care in NSW can be expected to increase from the current figure of 1,591 to over 2,300 by the end of the decade. ¹²

If the current rates of child removal are not reduced for other States and Territories the following increases in the number of Indigenous children removed from their families and placed in care should also be expected.

Population growth of appx 40% based on mid point between ABS low and high series projections for the Indigenous population, see ABS The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander People's; cat no 4704.0 2001 Table A19.

With 70% of the Indigenous population under the age of 30 not only will the number of children requiring out of home care escalate but at the same time placement options will decline. Quite simply there are fewer and fewer established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families able to provide substitute care and more and more children requiring substitute care.

All portfolio areas of government need to assess and plan for the impact of the age structure of the Indigenous population rather than reacting when it is too late for many children and young people.

JUVENILE JUSTICE AND MANDATORY SENTENCING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are much more likely to be held in juvenile corrective institutions than other young people. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are 21.3 times more likely to incarcerated. (Atkinson)

According to the Northern Territory Department of Corrective Services:

"The evidence is clear that the more access juveniles have to the criminal justice system the more frequently and deeper they will

penetrate it..... It has been shown that punishment of criminal offenders through incarceration in a juvenile detention centre or a prison has little positive effect. What happens in many cases is that the detainees learn from their fellow inmates how to become more effective in committing crime." ¹³

Both the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody and the *Bringing Them Home* report called for a national effort to reduce incarceration rates and the rate of child removal for welfare related reasons.

Specifically the Royal Commission called upon,

"governments and Aboriginal organisations to negotiate together to devise strategies designed to reduce the rate at which Aboriginal juveniles are involved in the welfare and criminal justice system, and in particular to reduce the rate at which Aboriginal juveniles are separated from their families or communities, whether by being declared to be in need of care, detained, imprisoned or otherwise," (RCIADIC, 1991)

Debate within Australia and abroad continues on mandatory sentencing laws which have been in effect in both the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Mandatory sentencing legislation does not comply with:

- The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice 1985 (Beijing rules)
- The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency 1990, (Riyadh Guidelines), and
- The United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty 1990. ¹⁴

SNAICC calls upon the next Australian Federal Government to pass legislation to repeal mandatory sentencing, prevent the extension of mandatory sentencing at a later date in all other States and Territories and meet Australia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

RESPONDING TO THE RIGHTS AND NEEDS OF THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

Since their formation SNAICC's oldest member agencies the AICCAs, (Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies), have been intimately involved in supporting the cause of the Stolen Generations.

The *Bringing Them Home* report into the Stolen Generations recognised that the deliberate break up of Aboriginal communities and families through the forced removal of children continues to have a devastating impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia.

"This inquiry has not been 'raking over the past' for its own sake. The truth is the past is very much with us today, in the continuing devastation of the lives of Indigenous Australians. That devastation cannot be addressed unless the whole community listens with an open heart and mind to the stories of what happened and, having listened and understood, commits itself to reconciliation." ¹⁵

The response by the Australian Federal government to the recommendations from *Bringing Them Home* has been inadequate in many areas including in its failure to:

- Provide a national apology to the Stolen Generations
- Develop a social justice package in order to address ongoing disadvantage for Indigenous children and families
- Enact national framework legislation, (based on the principle of self determination and the on the rights of children), to allow the transfer of child protection and juvenile justice functions back to accredited Indigenous community based organisations
- Enact national standards legislation for Indigenous children under state, territory or shared jurisdiction to set national standards for the care and protection of children and administration of juvenile justice
- Establish of a national compensation fund and national compensation fund board

- Legislate to implement the Genocide Convention with full domestic affect
- Legislate to amend the Commonwealth Family Law act 1975 to recognise the right of Indigenous children, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion and use their own language

Commencing with a proper national apology it is imperative that the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report are fully implemented.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY POVERTY

Entrenched family and community poverty creates the disadvantage which cripples Indigenous young people's participation in education and training and which in turn creates more unemployment and more poverty.

Impoverished communities raise impoverished children. Too many Indigenous communities are typified by inadequate housing, poor infrastructure, limited support services, poor transport and unreliable basic utilities. Children raised in impoverished communities live with poverty every day. Poverty was there when they were born and for many it will still be there when they die.

SNAICC believes this is the cycle of poverty which traps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people - not welfare dependency - a term which labels the victims of poverty.

Successful participation in education and training is critical if young people are to access any available employment opportunities. Without decent employment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are destined to live in poverty as they must depend on below poverty line government income support.

As Jonas (2000), points out

"Across every measurement of socio-economic status and well being, and across all age groups, geographical circumstances and genders, Australia's Indigenous people are

severely disadvantaged, and disproportionately so when compared to the rest of the Australian society. " ¹⁶

The average income of Indigenous young people aged 15 to 29 is \$171 per week which is less than one third that of other young Australians and their unemployment rate is double. Only 73.9% of Indigenous young people complete year 10 compared to 91.5% of all young people whilst only 12% of Indigenous young people are involved in tertiary education compared to around 40% of all young people aged 19.

Whilst modest gains have been made in the past two decades in relation to employment, albeit mostly due to the work for the dole/CDEP scheme, we are failing to create sustainable employment at a rate fast enough to keep pace with the growth in the number of Indigenous children and young people.

"Simply to prevent Indigenous labour force status from slipping further behind it will be necessary to maintain a commitment to special employment programs as well as to generate additional outcomes in the mainstream labour market. However, to move beyond this, and attempt to close the gap between Indigenous and other Australians will require an absolute relative expansion in Indigenous employment that is without precedent. Against key indicators of economic status, it is clear that the time available for decisive action is decreasing rapidly. In terms of employment status for example, the vital issue for Indigenous policy into the new millennium is the distinct prospect that the overall situation will deteriorate." ¹⁷

In order to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended the development of a National Indigenous Youth Strategy.

SNAICC reiterates the call for that strategy to be developed.

5. Making a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

The following provides some ideas to assist community sector organisations plan and implement practical activities that focus on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It aims to assist community sector organisations build partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

COMMUNITY AND MEMBERSHIP EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS

The first step for any organisation could be the development of an education program focussed on its members, staff and office bearers.

An education campaign delivered through your existing newsletters, meetings, journals and publications for several months does not require substantial additional resources.

Suggested Activities

- **Contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and find out as much as you can about the local Indigenous people in your area, the traditional owners of the land, the tribal name attributed to the land and its people, their cultural heritage and on going relationship with the land.**
- **Make contact with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and discuss with them how you might best go about providing information about their history and current activities to people involved in your organisation or service.**
- **Assess what resources you have including existing newsletters, publications, journals and general meetings through which you can distribute information on the issues of concern to the local Indigenous community**
- **Invite members of the local Indigenous community to speak at your annual general meeting or to discuss goals you have in common and may be able to work on together**

DEVELOP A SET OF ANNUAL COMMITMENTS TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

Organisations are encouraged to develop an annual program of events to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Issues such as unemployment, health, housing, juvenile justice, and access to education are crucial issues for the community sector and for Indigenous people. Indigenous communities are working on similar issues as broader community sector providing enormous scope for combined work.

Organisations are also encouraged to develop through liaison with their local Indigenous community a detailed awareness of the major events taking place in their local Indigenous communities. Annual events such as NAIDOC week, (first full week in July), and National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, (August 4th), can provide a focus for organisations to support their local Indigenous communities.

Suggested Activities

- **Include in your normal strategic/forward planning process consideration of an annual program of events around reconciliation.**
- **Evaluate how your normal on going events such as general meetings of members, annual conferences, seminars and workshops can include an Indigenous focus.**
- **Liaise with local Indigenous organisations to ascertain which feature events on their annual calendar could be supported by your organisation ie NAIDOC week, National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day and National Reconciliation week.**
- **Identify common issues that your organisation and Indigenous organisations could organise joint activities around as a way of building better relationships and providing mutual support for common issues**

SUMMARY

The most important thing people and organisations need to do is make contact with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations. Make a commitment to build reconciliation activities into your regular activities. Work with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to educate those involved in your organisation about the heritage, culture and history of your local community and the land on which you live.

6. Background Socio Economic Data

DEMOGRAPHICS

22% of the whole population is under 15 years of age, 40 per cent of the Indigenous population is under 15. 7% of the whole population is under 5 years of age, 15% of the Indigenous population is under 5 years, 68 % of the total Indigenous population are under the age of 30.

CHILD AND FAMILY WELFARE

According to the AIHW 1999/00 report on child protection, Indigenous children are over six times more likely to be removed from their families than other children and placed in out of home care. The key causal factors AIHW note in the report include:

- higher rates of poverty
- intergenerational effects of previous separations from family and culture
- cultural differences in child rearing practices, and
- a lack of access for families to support services

FAMILY SEPARATIONS - CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

Out of home care refers to the placement of children, with or without a child protection order in place, in the care of people other than their parents or guardians. Out of home care includes placement with relatives or kin and is generally distinguished by the fact that the carer receives some financial support for the care of the child(ren) from the relevant State or Territory Department.

The over representation of children in out of home care reflects the higher incidence of family stress and family breakdown within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is demonstrated by the rate ratio between Indigenous and Non Indigenous children with the national figure showing Indigenous children removed from their families at 6.1 times the rate of other children.

Children in Out of Home Care: June 2000

Number and rates of children per 1,000 aged 0-17 years by Indigenous status and by State/ Territory - June 30 2000

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST
Indigenous Children									
Number of Children	1,815	297	592	420	211	38	29	94	3,496
Rate per 1,000	32.9	27.5	11.0	15.4	19.5	5.1	18.9	3.9	18.3
Non Indigenous Children									
Number of Children	5,226	3,570	2,042	906	920	510	171	82	13,427
Rate per 1,000	3.4	3.2	2.4	2.0	2.7	4.5	2.2	2.3	3.0
Total Children									
Number of Children	7,041	3,867	2,634	1,326	1,131	548	200	176	16,923
Rate per 1,000	4.5	3.4	2.9	2.8	3.2	4.6	2.6	3.0	3.6
Rate Ratio									
Indigenous rate per 1,000 :	9.7:1	8.6:1	4.6:1	7.7:1	7.2:1	1.1:1	8.6:1	1.7:1	6.1:1
Non Indigenous									

Source: Child Protection Australia 1999/00. AIHW. cat no CWS 13 table 4.6

PLACEMENT OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN WITH NON INDIGENOUS FOSTER PARENTS

Despite the acceptance of the Indigenous Child Placement Principle approx 25% of Indigenous children removed from their families are still placed with non Aboriginal foster parents.

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH

Life expectancy at birth among non Indigenous people was 74.9 years for males and 80.6 years for females, life expectancy at birth was 15 to 20 years lower for Indigenous people

EDUCATION

Between 1995 and 1999 access to pre school education for Indigenous children declined - for all other children it increased. This was due to the increasing Indigenous population, age structure of the Indigenous population and a failure to provide enough new pre school places.

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to leave school early - one third had left school by age 15 or younger, compared to just 15% for all young people.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Unemployment persists at much higher rates amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than the whole Australian community. The unemployment rate is highest for Indigenous people 15 to 19 year olds, 50%, and also very high for 20 to 24 year olds, 46%.

NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT

26% of Indigenous people in employment were employed in the Community Development Employment Project, CDEP scheme, which is a work for the dole scheme provided through ATSIC.

Participation in the CDEP scheme grew rapidly from about 4,000 in 1991 and 25,000 1995. Increases in the employment of Indigenous people between 1991 and 1994 were largely the result of this growth in CDEP.

ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

20% of Indigenous households had an annual household income of less than \$16,000 per annum. A further 40% had household incomes of between \$16,001 and \$40,000.

HOMELESSNESS

Despite their small proportion of the total population Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 14% of all the clients under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Indigenous families are 20 times more likely to be homeless than non Indigenous families.

UNAFFORDABLE AND OVERCROWDED HOUSING

In 1995 17% of all Australian households were living in unaffordable or overcrowded housing or both. By comparison 38% of Indigenous households were living in these conditions.

LAW AND JUSTICE

According to the Australian Institute of Criminology Indigenous children and young people are 21.3 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non Indigenous counterparts.

Major Source: The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and The Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Footnotes

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- 2 *ibid* page 128
- 3 **Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAICC.** Submission to the Australian Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee – Inquiry into the Stolen Generations. SNAICC. Melbourne 2000.
- 4 **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare;** Child Protection Report 1998/99. AIHW cat no CWS 11. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 2000
- 5 *ibid* page 27
- 6 *ibid* page 38
- 7 **Ah Kee, Margaret and Tilbury, Clare.** *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is about self determination.* 'Children Australia' journal, Vol 24, No 3. 1999.. Page 6.
- 8 **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare;** Child Protection Report 1998/99. AIHW cat no CWS 11. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 2000
- 9 **Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.** *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000 - 2004.* March 2000, Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra. page 30
- 10 **Department of Family and Community Services –** Australian Commonwealth Government. *Census of Child Care 1997/8.* Australian Government Publishing Service, AGPS. Canberra. March 2000.
- 11 **Dodson, Mick.** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, HREOC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner – Fourth Annual Report. HREOC. Sydney 1996.
- 12 **NSW Community Services Commission.** *Inquiry into the practice and provision of substitute care in NSW. Forwards, backwards, standing still* Sydney. NSW. July 2000 page 115. [Note the estimate of 2,300 is based on a 44% increase in the Indigenous population aged 0 - 17 between 2000 and 2010 in NSW].
- 13 **Jonas, Dr William.** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. 'Social Justice Report 1999' Report No. 2/2000. HREOC. Sydney. 2000.
- 14 **Jonas, Dr William.** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. 'Social Justice Report 1999' Report No. 2/2000. HREOC. Sydney. 2000.
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- 16 **Jonas, Dr William.** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. 'Social Justice Report 1999' Report No. 2/2000. HREOC. Sydney. 2000
- 17 **Taylor, J and Hunter, B;** *The job still ahead: Economic costs of continuing Indigenous employment disparity,* Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, 1998, page iv

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- Atkinson, L.** *Detaining Aboriginal Juveniles as a last resort - Variations from the Theme, Trends and Issues.* As cited in: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, HREOC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner – Fourth Annual Report. HREOC. Sydney 1996.
- Dodson, Mick.** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, HREOC. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner – Fourth Annual Report. HREOC. Sydney 1996. See Table on page 18. Original source: Australian Institute of Criminology, Persons in Juvenile Corrective Institutions, No. 74 June 1996 Figure 4.
- Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody,** National Report, Volume 2, AGPS, Canberra 1991. Recommendations 62 page 252

Directory of Aboriginal and Islander Childcare Agencies, AICCA's

NSW

Burren Dalai (Kempsey)

Ph: (02) 6562 1913
Fax: (02) 6562 2623

Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Community Care Centre

Ph: (02) 6652 8850
Fax: (02) 6651 7847

Goorri Care (ACT)

Ph: (02) 6251 2955
Fax: (02) 6251 2955

Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services

Ph: (02) 4960 1657
Fax: (02) 4960 2876

Kari Aboriginal Resources Inc. (Morebank)

Ph: (02) 9822 4922
Fax: (02) 9824 0748

Manning Great Lakes Children's Service

Ph: (02) 6551 2088
Fax: (02) 6551 2060

Murawina Mt Druitt Children's Services

Ph: (02) 9625 2371
Fax: (02) 9625 4325

Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network (Casino)

Ph: (02) 6662 8044
Fax: (02) 6662 7934

NSW Aboriginal Children's Services (Redfern/Wagga/Cowra/St Mary's)

Ph: (02) 9699 9835
Fax: (02) 9699 3553

Urimbirra Co-op

Ph: (02) 9823 7541
Fax: (02) 9823 6948

QLD

Barambah AICCA

Ph: (07) 4618 2757
Fax: (07) 4618 2855
bacca@lister.burnette.net.au

Central Queensland AICCA (Rockhampton)

Ph: (07) 4922 2188
Fax: (07) 4922 7490

Caloundra ATSI Corp.

Ph: (07) 5491 8555
Fax: (07) 5491 8206

Indigenous Family and Child Support Service (Brisbane)

Ph: (07) 32174112
Fax: (07) 32174311

Kalwun AICCA (Nerang)

Ph: (07) 5578 4600
Fax: (07) 5596 3649

Kidz Care Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Services (Booval)

Ph: (07) 3816 2888
Fax: (07) 3816 2899

KIPA Indigenous Placement Agency (Caboolture)

Ph: (07) 5499 3822
Fax: (07) 5499 3833

Logan Indigenous Child and Family Services

Ph: (07) 3290 2077
Fax: (07) 3290 4733

Mackay AICCA - State Secretariat

Ph: (07) 4953 4452
Fax: (07) 4953 0583

Mt Isa AICCA

Ph: (07) 4743 9626
Fax: (07) 4743 3123

Palm Island Child Care Committee

Ph: (07) 4770 1101
Fax: (07) 4770 1101

South East QLD Aboriginal Community Care Agency (Toowoomba)

Ph: (07) 4632 7733
Fax: (07) 4632 6056

South West Community Care Aboriginal Corporation (Charlesville)

Ph: (07) 4654 3177
Fax: (07) 4654 3155

Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Service

Ph: (07) 7244 388

Undoonoo (Woorabinda)

Ph: (07) 4935 0107
Fax: (07) 4935 0212

Wide Bay Aboriginal Corporation for Child Protection

Ph: (07) 4151 8844
Fax: (07) 4151 0656

Yuddika AICCA

Ph: (07) 4051 1388
Fax: (07) 4051 4426

Yuenmandah Mornington Island

Ph: (07) 4745 7219
Fax: (07) 4745 7268

NT

Central Australia AICCA (Alice Springs)

Ph: (08) 8953 4895
Fax: (08) 8952 8719

Karu Aboriginal Child Care Agency (Darwin)

Ph: (08) 8922 7171
Fax: (08) 8922 7161

SA

SA Aboriginal Family Support Services (state wide service)

Ph: (08) 8212 1112
Fax: (08) 8212 1123

TAS

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, TAC

Ph: (03) 6234 8311
Fax: (03) 6231 1348

VIC

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (state wide service)

Ph: (03) 9471 1855
Fax: (03) 9471 1898

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association

Ph: (03) 9416 4266
Fax: (03) 9416 4147

WA

Manguri Corporation

Ph: (08) 9350 6735
Fax: (08) 9458 7941

Yorganop Aboriginal Child Care Agency

Ph: (08) 9227 9022
Fax: (08) 9227 9019

Djooraminda

Ph: (08) 9378 2522
Fax: (08) 9378 1113

Directory of Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services, MACs

NSW

Allira MACS (Dubbo)

Ph: (02) 6882 9503

Fax: (02) 6884 3693

Awabakal Child Care Centre (Wickham)

Ph: (02) 4961 6429

Fax: (02) 4940 0548

Birrelee MACS (Tamworth)

Ph: (02) 6765 3470

Fax: (02) 6765 9141

Gujaga MACS (Marickville)

Ph: (02) 9661 6097

Fax: (02) 9694 1239

Murawina Mt Druitt Coop Ltd

Ph: (02) 9625 2371

Fax: (02) 9625 4325

Ngaku MACS (Kempsey)

Ph: (02) 6562 8744

Fax: (02) 6563 1526

Noogaleek Children's Centre (Berkeley)

Ph: (02) 4271 8468

Fax: (02) 4272 4906

Ooranga Wandarrah MACS (Campbelltown)

Ph: (02) 4628 4837

Fax: (02) 4628 2725

Towri MACS (Bathurst)

Ph: 02. 6332 1467

Fax: 02. 6332 4829

Wiradjuri Neighbourhood Centre (Wagga Wagga)

Ph: (02) 6921 7747

Fax: (02) 6921 9340

Wreck Bay MACS

Ph: (02) 4442 1131

Fax: (02) 4442 1131

Yalbillinga Boori Day Care (Cowra)

Ph: (02) 6342 1300

Fax: (02) 6341 4168

NT

Batchelor MACS (Batchelor College)

Ph: (08) 8939 7140

Fax: (08) 8939 7100

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Child Care Centre

(Ampe Kenhe Apmere: Child's Place)

Ph: (08) 8951 4499

Fax: (08) 8951 4438

Minbani Family Centre (Darwin)

Ph: (08) 8945 2378

Fax: (08) 8945 2253

Na Wulg Wulg (Katherine)

Ph: (08) 8971 0944

Fax: (08) 8971 0947

SA

Kaurna Plains Early Childhood Centre (Elizabeth)

Ph: (08) 8255 3299

Fax: (08) 8287 6682

Koonibba Child Care Centre (Ceduna)

Ph: (08) 8625 0093

Fax: (08) 8625 0062

Kura Yerlo MACS (Port Adelaide)

Ph: (08) 8449 7367

Fax: (08) 8341 7006

Umoona Community MACS (Coober Pedy)

Ph: (08) 8672 5644

Fax: (08) 8672 5266

Wynbring Jida MACS (Whyalla)

Ph: (08) 8649 3737

Fax: (08) 8649 3044

QLD

Gooddo Day Care Centre (Palm Island)

Ph: (07) 4770 1182

Fax: (07) 4770 1182

Gundoo Day Care Centre (Cherbourg)

Ph: (07) 4168 2832

Fax: (07) 4168 3349

gundoo@hotmail.net.au

Undoonoo (Woorabinda)

Ph: (07) 4935 0107

Fax: (07) 4935 0212

VIC

Barrimba Child Care Agency (Echuca)

Ph: (03) 5480 6330

Fax: (03) 5482 5104

Bung Yarda MACS (Lake Tyres)

Ph: (03) 5156 5718

Fax: (03) 5156 5554

Lidje MACS Aboriginal Corporation (Mooroopna)

Ph: (03) 5825 1632

Fax: (03) 5825 4511

Gunai Lidge MACS (Morwell)

Ph: (03) 5136 5127

Fax: (03) 5133 8069

Robinvale MACS (Robinvale)

Ph: (03) 5026 3196

Fax: (03) 5026 4332

Yappera Children's Service (Thornbury)

Ph: (03) 9416 8787

Fax: (03) 9480 4829

TAS

Aboriginal Children's Centre (Hobart)

Ph: (03) 6272 7099

Fax: (03) 6273 0869

Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (Launceston)

Ph: 03. 6331 6671

Fax: 03. 6331 6969

WA

Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre (Thornlie)

Ph: (08) 9459 3868

Fax: (08) 9493 2994

Gurlongga Njininj (Perth)

Ph: (08) 9228 2428

Fax: (08) 9228 2430

Jalygur Guwan (Broome)

Ph: (08) 9193 5510

Fax: (08) 9193 6171

Rose Nowers Child Care Centre (South Headland)

Ph: 08. 9140 1293

Fax: 08. 9140 1314

Yaandina MACS (Roeburn)

Ph: (08) 9182 1248

Fax: (08) 9182 1172

Directory of National Organisations

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, ATSIC

Ph: (02) 6121 4000
<http://www.atsic.gov.au>

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAICC

Ph: (03) 9482 9380
email: snaicc@vicnet.net.au
(<http://snaicc.asn.au> from 2002)

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, AIATSIS

Ph: (02) 6246 1111
<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au>

Koori Mail Newspaper

Ph: (02) 6622 2666
<http://koorimail.com>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW

Ph: (02) 6244 1157
<http://www.aihw.gov.au>

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, CAEPR

Ph: (02) 6125 0587
<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/>

National Aboriginal & Islander Community Controlled Health Organisation, NACCHO

Ph: (02) 6282 7513
<http://www.naccho.org.au>

National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat, NAILSS

Ph: (07) 3211 3522
email: nailss@powerup.com.au

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

Ph: (03) 9214 7871
<http://www.aifs.org.au/nch>

Reconciliation Australia

Ph: (02) 6295 9266
<http://www.reconciliation.org.au>



'Home Is Where the Heart Is' by Irene O'Loughlin

The painting is titled "Home Is Where the Heart Is" because home is where my mother is - she held my hand for just a little while, my heart she holds forever. (My mother, Winifred Joyce O'Loughlin (nee Wanganeen) passed away on the 8th of July, 1994)

The artist would have liked to have used the Aboriginal flag as the central focal point, but was unable to contact the flag's designer, Mr Harold Thomas, to obtain his permission to have allowed her to incorporate the flag into the painting.

This painting tells the story of our stolen generations - not only of the sorrow and enormous loss they experienced away from their people but also the joy and sense of belonging when they came home.

At the centre of the painting are four hearts, North, South, East and West - the width and breadth of our country. Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed into a totally alien environment far away from home, all over Australia. The colors of the Aboriginal flag are used here, as these colours - red, yellow and black - are significantly symbolic to all indigenous Australians, it gave us

a sense of identity and brought us together as a nation, which has survived 210 years of invasion.

Out of this centre point, is a circle of women, which represents the mothers who have waited for the return of their children.

The four tracks represent the direction from which the children find their way home. Along the paths are the footprints of the lost children. The children's footprints in the the outer circle represents those who have come home.

The tears depicted in this painting represent the anguish, loss and happiness.

The child's handprints represent the searching for children to find their identity and also for the welcoming for their return home. Again, the mother holds the child's hand in hers.