

SNAICC

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc.

Media Release

(Monday August 1st 2004 – for immediate release)

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day Wednesday August 4th

"One Childhood - One Chance"

Muriel Cadd, SNAICC Chairperson said today in the lead up to National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day, (NAICD), Wednesday August 4th, "on children's day this year communities across Australia will be celebrating with children and families the importance of children. SNAICC started National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day in 1988 to provide an opportunity for the whole nation to reflect on the importance of nurturing, supporting and caring for Indigenous children."

SNAICC chooses a theme each year and the theme for 2004 is ***One Childhood - One Chance: Let's not take a chance in our future - Invest in our future leaders.***

Ms Cadd said, "SNAICC had been encouraged by the response to children's day with communities across the country celebrating the day. In Kalgoorlie the health service is organising a family fun day, in Alice Springs Indigenous art and craft activities are being organised in schools, preschools and childcare, in Cairns kids in care are organising an Indigenous fashion show, in the Torres Strait communities have organised a bamboo festival with Elders teaching children traditional techniques for building spears, rafts and using bamboo for traditional games, in Hobart the children's centre are having an open day with parents and modeling how to play with young children, in the NT Imparja television have dedicated children's programming to celebrate children's day, the Daruk Aboriginal Medical Service is organising a re-union of all children born with support from their ante-natal service since 1990 and in all states and territories children's services are organising events for kids in care, events to get birth families and foster families back together and flag raising ceremonies for kids to take pride in their culture.

She added that, "government departments and mainstream agencies were also getting involved with for example the ACT Office for Children, Youth and Family Services holding a luncheon and forum on children's issues with their Minister and 150 workers."

Ms Cadd said "SNAICC was encouraging people to remember that children only get one chance for a wonderful childhood and that a child's early experiences in life have a profound impact on their development. Governments have a part to play as well she said and in the lead up to the Federal Election SNAICC had released a paper with seven key priorities for all governments to be working on for children, see attached summary.

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Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Seven Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families

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

SNAICC has identified the following seven policy priorities, each of equal importance, that we believe all Australian governments should adopt to extend recent efforts to improve the health, welfare and education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC has provide more details about these key reforms and specific initiatives needed to implement them on our web site, www.snaicc.asn.au

A National Apology

A national apology, which acknowledges the harsh injustices of past child removals, and the ongoing impact of these on the health, happiness, and parenting skills of current generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a foundation upon which the success of many other initiatives will depend. When we fail to recognise how the past lives on, we allow the injustices of the past to continue.

Child removal and the economic, social and political segregation of Aboriginal people throughout Australia, for a period of a hundred years or more, laid the foundations for the unemployment, poverty, homelessness, poor educational access and family dysfunction which many Indigenous people experience today. A national apology will assist both the Indigenous community, and the broader Australian community to have faith in the Government's integrity in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family welfare.

Healing and Education

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, adults, families and communities have been affected by family violence and child abuse. The effects of this can cause misery, stress and illness for many many years and have repercussions for future generations. Individuals, families and communities need a range of well-being programs and culturally appropriate therapies to heal their pain and suffering, overcome past trauma and learn to build healthy relationships and care for and protect themselves and others.

Fewer Contemporary Removals

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are still far more likely to be removed from their families than non-Indigenous children through the child protection systems of Australia's states and territories. Nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost seven times more likely to be removed than other children. SNAICC calls on the Australian Government and state and territory governments to set targets to progressively reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in contemporary removal statistics.

Child Protection Reforms

Issues such as poverty, illness, substance abuse and the inter-generational effects of previous Stolen Generations policies mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are more likely to need the services provided by child protection departments. Reforms to the way child protection authorities respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in these circumstances are urgently needed. Minimum standards for the care, protection and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in need of care need to be developed by communities in partnership with governments and outcomes in child protection need to be independently monitored and reported on at the national level.

Early Childhood Programs

The importance of the early childhood years has been widely recognised, but too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disadvantaged at the point of commencing primary school due to preventable health and development problems and lack of access to quality child care and early childhood education. These children may get left behind and go on to become the unemployed, marginalised and impoverished young people of the next generation. SNAICC calls on all Australian governments to better respond to the health, well-being, development, education, cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the early childhood years. Additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services are urgently needed to catch up with the rapidly increasing proportion of young children in the Indigenous population

Capacity Building

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are providing many successful programs and services for families and children across the country. It is now time to provide better service coverage and expand the range of services provided, with a particular focus on prevention and early intervention programs. We need to support and strengthen the programs, resources and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care, child development and child and family welfare services of all types and implement initiatives to overcome the critical shortage of trained Indigenous staff within the children's services sector.

Better Planning

Planning for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is currently inadequately thought-through, ad hoc and uncoordinated. SNAICC, a small community based organisation is the only national body focussing on these issues. A better-planned response to the urgent problems confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is urgently needed. This response must involve governments and community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations working closely together.

*SNAICC: The national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
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