

# **SNAICC Draft Policy Statement**

## **- Developing an effective child well-being and protection system -**

### **Introduction**

SNAICC is currently developing a policy statement on the *Guiding Principles* which should underpin child protection in all States and Territories and a statement on *Valuing Children*.

We intend to use the policy statement in our discussions and advocacy with all governments in relation to children's well being and child protection. SNAICC has described below what features an effective child protection system would have, the guiding principles that should underpin our approach to child protection and the values we hold for children.

The SNAICC National Executive has developed this draft document following on from discussion at our AGM and would welcome feedback, comments or suggestions before May 10<sup>th</sup>, when the National Executive have their next meeting.

SNAICC is particularly interested in comments on the *Guiding Principles* and *Values Statements* included below. Comments can be made to Julian Pocock, SNAICC Executive Officer at; [julian@snaicc.asn.au](mailto:julian@snaicc.asn.au); by phone on 039 489 8099 or fax on 039 489 8044

### **Features of an effective child well-being and protection system**

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

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

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

## Guiding Principles

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

1. Recognition of the ongoing impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families of child welfare policy and practices in previous generations that separated children from their families and families from their lands and country
2. Acceptance that trust and honest dialogue between governments and communities and a shared commitment to finding solutions is an essential starting point to building an integrated child and family wellbeing system
3. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices, cultures, diversity and family as a central tenet of service provision
4. Commitment to build family capacity and responsibility as the most important life long support system for children and the foundation of the social, cultural and emotional infrastructure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development
5. Family and community based decision making and adherence to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle
6. Intergenerational commitment to re-building the capability and available resource base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families to raise strong, healthy, happy children.
7. Informed and meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement in the design, development and delivery of services in the child protection and well-being sector
8. Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to child rearing and family centred strengths based practice within the design of programs across all types of service providers
9. Understanding that in the best interests of children an integrated child wellbeing and protection system should proactively link Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific and mainstream services around the particular needs of children and families
10. Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have a diversity of governance structures and levels of community control with all stakeholders taking into account local community history, current circumstances and need for improved community control
11. Government funding and resource allocations based on the needs of children taking account of the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system
12. Commitment to end the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child welfare system and to sustainability, accountability and sound and appropriate evaluation and reporting

## **SNAICC Values Statement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**

SNAICC has developed two draft statements for comment and feedback, (see below). You may wish to comment on the different styles of the statements or particular parts of each statement.

### **Statement One.**

1. We believe our children have the right to;
  - live in communities that are safe and free from violence
  - identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians
  - be proud of our history, cultural beliefs and practices
  - maintain connection to their land, community, family and kinship systems
  - life long education that strengthens their cultural identity
  - be taught their cultural heritage and obligations by their Elders
  - benefit from the knowledge of their Elders to guide their journey in life
2. We believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are;
  - our present and our future and should have access to good health, well being, education, economic security and independence so they will be empowered to achieve their full potential
3. We believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should;
  - be taught to respect their Elders so that they can make a strong contribution to enrich their community and as a members of the wider community

### **Statement Two.**

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a living culture through our children. Children must be protected encouraged and nurtured to ensure the survival of the oldest culture in history
2. Our children's cultural identity must be respected in accordance to our ancestral ways, lifestyle beliefs and values and this can be done by providing a setting of loving, caring and safe communities providing opportunities for growth development and self empowerment
3. Our children have a right to live in a safe and happy family and community environment that gives guidance to their future - developing individuality and self confidence with good living and life skills
4. The innocent spirit of our children must be protected by listening, giving them opportunities to develop their self confidence and supporting them to contribute to their community as young adolescents
5. Our children must have the opportunities, which encourage education so they can build on their self-confidence to maintain their culture through learning journeys. Education is important to be both cultural and academic to ensure complete future growth for the child
6. Our young people are helped and encouraged to develop skills to gain employment opportunities with self confidence in themselves and their culture
7. By following cultural ways young people are encouraged to become role models and mentors for the younger generations ensuring the continuation of our culture.

## **Attachment A. The Role of Primary Secondary and Tertiary Services**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Primary**

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

### **Secondary:**

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

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

**Tertiary:**

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

Where child removal is necessary;

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

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

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