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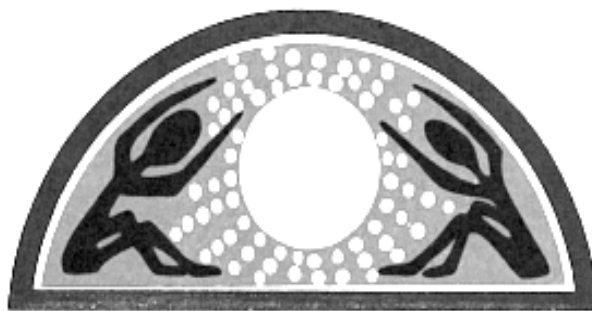
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## **SNAICC NEWS SUMMER 2002/2003**

### **Strategic Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood**

We are delighted to announce the formation of a strategic partnership between SNAICC and the Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) around early childhood. CCCH, based at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, has had a major involvement in raising public and government awareness of the critical importance of the early years of life. (See separate article in this issue on The Centre for Community Child Health).

SNAICC and CCCH believe it is critical that Indigenous families and children have access to early childhood programs and services which are culturally appropriate and responsive to their particular needs. Access by Indigenous children and families to preschool and early childhood services and support falls well behind that of the rest of the Australian community, and is declining (SNAICC, 2001).

#### **National project**

The new SNAICC & CCCH partnership has very recently been successful in attracting some funding from the Myer Foundation for a national project which aims to:

1. assist Indigenous people to have an effective voice on current and future practice in early childhood matters with particular emphasis on children aged 0-3 and their families;
2. recognise Indigenous expertise and good practice in the area of early childhood development
3. document and promote the innovative and effective work being carried out by Indigenous services and communities to support Indigenous children aged 0-3 and their families
4. influence responses to the early years research and the development of the National Agenda for Early Childhood

SNAICC and the CCCH will be working together to document and promote the types of innovative work that Indigenous services and communities are currently carrying out to support families with young children — particularly children under the age of 3.

By documenting the good practice and innovative work of Indigenous services, including MACS, playgroups, health services, family support services and Indigenous child care centres, the project will recognise the valuable work being carried out by Indigenous communities to support their young children.



This will involve consultations with Indigenous agencies from each state and territory, beginning in early February 2003, to identify current initiatives, services, programs and activities that

- Σ engage Indigenous parents and very young children together around enhancing their children's development;
- Σ support the development and well being of Indigenous children particularly those under the age of 3;
- Σ assist Indigenous families with raising children - particularly when the children are very young.

The type of activities and programs we are interested in is quite broad but would include parenting programs, playgroups, programs to support young children who may have experienced violence or abuse, support groups for first time parents, flexible child care programs, programs to assist children develop language and cultural knowledge, health and nutrition programs and family support groups.

It is likely that some of these initiatives or ideas may come from services that might not describe themselves as "early childhood" services eg. family support services. After initial contact with key people in each state / territory (including government, service providers and non-government organisations), a small advisory group will be formed, and consultations with identified services will occur by telephone or selected site visits.

### **National Agenda for Early Childhood**

**Recent evidence from research on the human brain has established that the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, sets the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life (Shore, R., 1997; McCain and Mustard, 1999). Nurturing and responsive care-giving in the first years of life, along with good early child development programs, and good nutrition, help prepare children for school, and improve their outcomes in later life, in terms of learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health. The earlier in life these programs begin, the better.**

In addition, there are insufficient services that actively involve parents with their young children in informal ways that support parenting skills and their role in early child development. We also know that many parents (Indigenous or not) who are experiencing disadvantage may have little understanding of child development, and may need some support to meet their children's developmental needs (Rogers & Martin, 2001:67). This support might include gentle modelling of communicating with babies, demonstrating the link between play and child development, language development activities and socialising with other young children.

In the coming months the Federal Government will release a draft National Agenda for Early Childhood for consultation. One outcome from the project will be the opportunity to influence the National Agenda by highlighting not just the issues and problems that confront Indigenous communities but the local solutions that Indigenous communities are developing.

### **Project Report**

Information from these consultations will be drawn together as a discussion paper, with case studies, which will be presented at the National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar to be held probably in June. A number of key conference participants and others will be invited to discuss the paper, add to our knowledge of current or possible programs and assist in recommendations. Any such additions will be followed up before completion of the final project report for distribution to a broad range of key stakeholders.

### **Getting your work/activities included in the project report**

**We are inviting anyone who knows of, or is undertaking, innovative work with Indigenous 0 to 3 year old children and their parents/carers in line with the aims of this project to contact the Project Coordinator. SNAICC and the CCCH intend to include a number of case studies and examples of good practice so please contact Rosemary about your work with Indigenous young children and their carers.**

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## **About the Centre for Community Child Health**

The Centre for Community Child Health is a world-recognised centre of excellence supporting and empowering communities to continually improve the health, well-being and quality of life for children and their families.

The Centre's commitment is achieved through high quality education and training, clinical services, research, project consultancy, policy development and advocacy.

The Centre is under the umbrella of three prominent organisations. It is a University of Melbourne academic centre based at the Royal Children's Hospital, one of the world's leading paediatric hospitals.

It is also a key centre of the Murdoch Children's Research Unit, Australia's largest institute devoted to research in child and adolescent health.

The Centre embraces the philosophy that the promotion of children's health and wellbeing begins in the community and this drives our agenda.

The Centre believes that:

- The early years of children's lives have a significant impact on their physical, behavioural and social development later in life
- Many conditions and common problems faced by children are preventable or can be improved if they are recognised and managed early
- The best results are achieved where professionals work in close partnerships with parents who are supported and empowered to make the best choices for their children



- Supporting and strengthening community-based professionals and organisations ensures the best chance of good outcomes for children and their families
- Up-to-date research and evidence of what is shown to be effective and appropriate should inform policy formulation, organisation of services, professional practice with children and their families, and community development.

The Early Childhood Unit of the Centre was established during 1999 in recognition of the increasing evidence of the importance of the early years of life, especially the first three years. The Unit has a multi-disciplinary team that draws together a range of projects related to young children. In the early childhood field, the Unit provides leadership in research and program and policy development. The Unit has planned a long-term strategy of national activities to assist with the integration of services for families with young children, and to promote partnerships between children's services and child and family health services in Australia.

Areas of particular interest include:

- \* Exploring innovative models and pathways to achieving positive outcomes for children and families with high needs
- \* Contributing to health promotion policy at all levels.

The Early Childhood Unit has been contracted by government departments at all levels, and commercial sponsors to undertake resource development, research projects and professional development activities due to its expertise in the identified areas of interest and priorities. Recent projects include needs analyses, service development consultancies, and in particular:

- \* a consultancy to the Brotherhood of St. Laurence to explore interventions through which the organisation might improve the life chances of children from disadvantaged families by enhancing the first three years of their childhood
- \* research for the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services to inform the development of a capacity-building program for all professionals and volunteers who work with or support infants and young children (0 to 3 years).

The Centre believes the best results for improving children's health are achieved by working in partnerships. Consequently, Centre is committed to sharing its knowledge and expertise and has developed links with the community through community based professionals and organisations, policy makers, academic institutions, hospital departments and research centres.

Recent collaborative work between SNAICC and the Centre is an example of the approach taken by the Centre in seeking to improve the health and well being of all children. For further information about the Centre and our other activities please feel free to contact us.

**Centre for Community Child Health**

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