

Overview

- This short presentation will cover:
 - Historical context for child welfare policy
 - Background on SNAICC and our typical activities
 - Success of the AICCAs and unfinished business
 - SNAICC and the AICCA review
 - FaCs (Melinda) will then cover AICCA and IP&FWB program reviews in detail

Historical Context

- Since the earliest days of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were subjected to racist and profoundly damaging policies of state intervention into the lives of their families
- The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children affected all families
- Policies were based on the premise that Indigenous families were incapable of caring for their children

Historical Context (con't)

- Child removal, economic, social and political segregation of Aboriginal people practiced throughout Australia, for over a hundred years
- In early part of twentieth century church and government missions or reserves were opened and operated in every State and Territory
- Conditions in the missions, reserves and compounds were often harsh and children were typically only to be trained for domestic, pastoral and low skilled areas of employment

Historical Context (con't)

- This was consistent with the racist belief that Aboriginal people, mixed descent or not, were not capable of anything more, and conveniently corresponded to fulfilling the economic needs of the colonial State for these forms of labour
- These policies laid the foundations for the unemployment, poverty, homelessness, poor educational access and family dysfunction which Indigenous people experience today
- Communities and families have consistently advocated that they should determine what is best for their children

Communities taking control

- Critical to the elevation of these issues to national prominence has been the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- In 1927 the New South Wales based Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association sent the NSW Premier a petition which 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.*"
- The development of SNAICC and the AICCAs forms part of an on-going struggle by communities to take charge of the welfare of their children

Background on SNAICC

- SNAICC is the national peak body representing the interests of Indigenous children
- Operates from a base of community controlled services working with children and families
- AICCAs, Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies, the first Indigenous child welfare

- agencies formed from mid 1970's
- SNAICC established by AICCAs as the national peak body for children from 1981
- AICCAs originally established with the ambition of being universal support services for families preventing children from being removed by welfare authorities

Background on SNAICC (con't)

- After initial success in establishing AICCAs development of services stalled from mid 1980's
- Commonwealth becomes involved in funding establishment and part operation of AICCAs
- Since 1987 Commonwealth has not sought to expand number, operation or scope of services
- Over the past two years Commonwealth (FaCS) has significantly improved SNAICC's funding

Typical SNAICC activities

- Production of "Through Black Eyes - Family Violence Resource Handbook" in 1991 and 1992;
- SNAICC the first national Indigenous organisation to call for an inquiry into the 'Stolen Generations'
- Establishment National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day - NAICD (August 4th each year)
- 'Proposed Plan of Action for Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities' in 1996
- Second National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Survival conference in June 1997

Typical SNAICC activities (con't)

- Represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations
- Production of *Through Young Black Eyes*, resources to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect
- Convening the 2003 National Indigenous Child Welfare and Development Seminar
- Work with QLD AICCAs to secure major funding boost for QLD services from 2004/05

Typical SNAICC activities (con't)

- Publication of *State of Denial* - research report on child abuse and neglect in the NT
- Preparation of a report on Indigenous parenting support, information and programs for FaCS
- Advocacy to major political parties on children's policy for upcoming Federal election
- Establishment with FaCS of a National Indigenous Family and Children's Resource Centre in 2004/05

Success of the AICCAs

- Approximately 38 AICCAs have been established across Australia providing services including:
 - Foster care recruitment, training and support
 - Link Up and family reunification
 - Parenting and family support, mostly for families with child protection concerns
 - Advocacy for families and children in relation to child protection matters
 - Community input into decisions regarding the placement of children in out-of-home care

Success of the AICCAs (con't)

- AICCAs and SNAICC establish the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle, ACP
- From 1983 ACP agreed to by all governments as fundamental to the operation of child protection
- Under the ACP child removal is a last resort and those children removed must, if possible, be placed within their Indigenous family/culture/community

Success of the AICCAs (con't)

- AICCAs providing better placement options for children with fewer placement breakdowns
- Thousands of Indigenous children have grown up with their community and culture due to advocacy and services provided by AICCAs
- The right of Indigenous communities to self determine the appropriate arrangements for the welfare of children recognised

Unfinished business

- Indigenous children still removed from families at nearly seven times the rate of other Australian children
- 25% of all Indigenous children in care still placed with non-Indigenous foster carers
- Most communities don't have access to an AICCA
- AICCA services rarely funded to operate on a 24 hr basis in responding to child protection notifications/issues

Unfinished business (con't)

- Growth in the Indigenous population means the number of kids in all forms of alternative care is escalating
- Underlying issues which cause family breakdown have not been fully addressed
- State welfare authorities not obligated to accept the advice of AICCAs on the best interests of children
- AICCA services not able to fulfill their original mission to provide universal family support and keep children out of care

Unfinished business (con't)

- Commonwealth has not increased its support or assistance for AICCAs since 1987
- Service system still unbalanced with focus on crisis intervention not primary prevention
- Considerable number of AICCA services experiencing severe difficulties in their working relationships with State, Territory and Commonwealth funding bodies
- SNAICC and FaCS agree on the need for a review

SNAICC and the AICCA review

- Outcomes sought by SNAICC
 - Clear program guidelines with emphasis on early intervention and family support
 - Flexibility for services to respond to changing needs
 - Consistency in reporting requirements but flexible reporting methods
 - Clarification of respective roles of States/Territories and Commonwealth
 - In the long term expansion of the number and scope of agencies to meet community needs

Summary

- Indigenous child welfare policy has gone through two major transitions since colonisation:
 - Assimilation and separation. Typified by the racist policies of child removal
 - Washing hands of responsibility. Typified by the willingness of government to establish but then turn their backs on AICCAs

Summary (con't)

- SNAICC is pursuing a third way:
 - Self determination supported by real partnerships in which the welfare of Indigenous children is a shared concern
- AICCA review represents an opportunity to put this new way of working together into practice - here's hoping.