MEDIA RELEASE
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Large gathering of local and international child and family specialists to address disadvantage at major conference

After a six-year hiatus, the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) international conference is making a long-awaited comeback, with a jam-packed program designed to tackle the most critical issues facing vulnerable children, families, and young people.

ACWA CEO, Maree Walk, says: "It's a thrill that we've been able to bring back one of the sector's most significant gatherings as people with lived experience, seasoned practitioners and leaders, plus both local and international academics, converge to discuss ways forward to help families and children thrive."

Held at ICC Sydney over three days from June 5-7, a spotlight will shine on topics associated with early intervention, family preservation, child protection, domestic and family violence, plus out-of-home care.

"It is a stimulating program of the latest research, evidence, and practice from all over Australia and internationally, and we're especially grateful to all those with lived experience such as Aboriginal author and film director, Brenda Matthews, who are generously sharing their stories to inspire the robust discussions needed to drive positive change," continues Maree.

Several sessions will focus on issues related to Aboriginal children and families, with Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC, delivering a keynote address titled *Safe and Supported*; followed by Commissioners from across the country hosting a symposium on self-determination, child protection decision-making and oversight.

NSW Women's Safety Commissioner, Hannah Tonkin, will chair a session on *Safe Families - Reimagining our Communities, Systems and Services*, featuring leaders discussing the intersection of domestic and family violence and child protection issues.

Three of the country's Children's Court presiding judges will speak at a symposium, exploring how they're adopting innovative solutions to challenges facing multiple jurisdictions.

Five prominent international keynote speakers, who have each delivered ground-breaking work in their specialised areas, will share their knowledge and expertise in presentations and masterclasses.

These include:

- Professor Darcey Merritt from the University of Chicago
- Dr Kiaras Gharabaghi from Toronto Metropolitan University
- Associate Professor Stephanie Holt from Trinity College Dublin
- Professor Jonathan Scourfield from Cardiff University
- Associate Professor Emily Keddell from University of Otago.

NSW Minister Kate Washington will officially open ACWA's biennial conference, which was last held in 2018, after the 2020 and 2022 events were unable to proceed due to Covid restrictions. NSW Governor, Margaret Beazley AC KC, will officiate the Conference's Welcome Reception.

Popular award-winning comedian Lizzy Hoo will MC the Gala Dinner, which includes announcing the winners of the ACWA Awards that celebrate child and family workers across the state.

The entire conference program can be viewed at acwaconference.com.au

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About the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA)
The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is the NSW non-government peak body representing the voice of community organisations working with vulnerable children, young people, and their families.

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