



L-R: Front: Glendra Stubbs, Dana Clarke, Minister Linda Burney MP, Michelle Lester, Gail Pencheff, Angela Webb, Lyn Gall. Back: Damian Matcham, Shandel Tarabay, Narelle Gurney, Bill Pritchard, Samantha Joseph, Didjeridoo performer Glen Timbery.

17 March 2010

An historic agreement was signed between NSW Community Services and AbSec recognising the need for better collaboration to protect our children. AbSec Chair said at the signing 'I want to mention those that have made this possible – Jenny Mason and Annette Gallard, Simon Jordan and Michael Higgins from the Aboriginal Services Branch who with Jo Grisard and our CEO Bill Pritchard have written this final version, the AbSec board who guided/drove Bill to make sure this was a priority. To Linda and her team... 'champions of our people'... There has never been anything quite like this MoU and it had to be developed out of the ground.'

## Lots happening! Our NSW friends tell their stories.

*SAF,T – the NT peak for Aboriginal Children, Youth and Families – has sought the knowledge and experience of interstate colleagues to inform our decision making and help grow our NT Aboriginal child, youth and family services.*

*Margie Furber, SAF,T Chair; Josie Crawshaw, CEO; Victoria Pollifrone, Policy Manager; and Black Wattle Consulting have visited and talked with services from WA, SA, Victoria and NSW. SAF,T have gained both many new friends and informative learnings to develop our future directions. Every story has been a grand story, and nowhere more than in NSW where the transfer of out of home care to the NGO sector, including to the Aboriginal community controlled service sector, is in full swing.*

*So read these interviews with NSW colleagues including Aboriginal service managers, running their services, for their children. Many ideas, many paths.*

### Some things they said

*All of the NSW Aboriginal agencies started off by recruiting and supporting foster carers – we did, Burrun Dalai, Ngunya Jajum, KARI, the new agencies such as Coffs Harbour and Illawarra. It's a nice way to start.*

**Amanda Bridge – Manning / Great Lakes Aboriginal Children Services**

*Start small, have vision, a plan, stick to it, start a service, achieve some small successes, stay steadfast for the first five years, gain a community reputation, show you can be trusted.*

**Paul Ralph – KARI**

*Use a self-determination and human rights framework for determining objectives.*

*Experience shows that organisations work best when they build around their longer term goals.*

**Terri Libesman – University of Technology Sydney**

*Look to where you can be most useful and influential then add services on to this.*

*Partnering with other agencies is a good option early on to leverage off their infrastructure and use their expertise.*

**Kerryn Boland – NSW Children's Guardian**

*Make sure it's not about being rung up about a child and then them ticking a box to say they have consulted with an Aboriginal organisation. If they are serious they need to fund it.*

**Dana Clarke – Burrun Dalai**

*Our philosophy is that all Aboriginal carers are kinship carers – our communities are all related.*

*Look at good training for the board and managers. It's fundamental.*

**Tracey Keevers-Keller – AbSec**

*Years back I said my vision is to take care of all the Bundjalung kids in our nation. One DOCS staff member said, "In your dreams!" Well it's come to pass. We have worked hard, we are very proud of what we have accomplished!*

**Lenore Marlowe – Ngunya Jarjum**



#### **SAFT**

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*SAFT is the NT peak for  
Aboriginal Children, Youth  
and Families.*

#### **SAFT vision**

For all Aboriginal children and young people across the NT to grow up safe, strong and proud in functional families, connected to their past, hopeful for their future and able to reach their full potential.

#### **SAFT purpose**

To increase Aboriginal decision making and evidence based approaches in the design and implementation of policies, programs and services targeting Aboriginal children and young people and families in the NT by adopting a child centred, rights based approach.

#### **Acknowledgements**

SAFT thank the many services who so generously contributed their time and resources to SAFT.

#### **Credits**

NSW service interviews undertaken and reported by Black Wattle Consulting: Nina Kelabora, Julie Sleight and Rosie Elliott.

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## **Big changes for NSW Aboriginal child and family services: Transfer of NSW out of home care to NGOs**

**There have been three major NSW reviews of out of home care in the past twenty years (Usher, Fitzgerald and Wood), which all recommended that children would be better served by placement with NGOs.**

**1999–2000** AbSec, NSW peak body for Aboriginal Child and Family Services established, auspiced for first two years by ACWA.

**2003** New standards for out of home care released by the NSW Children's Guardian. Existing designated agencies given until 2013 for accreditation provided they participated in the Quality Improvement Program. Minimum data set development; performance monitoring framework.

**2005** Initial round of "High Needs Kids" residential and foster care contracts tendered and issued to NGOs for the 3 year period 2005–2008.

**2006** Costings Manual – revised in 2008, developed in consultation with the community sector.

**2007–08** Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW (Wood Inquiry) takes the advice of the Children's Guardian regarding the better quality of care provided to children and young people in NGOs, based on her case file audits. The Inquiry recommends all children taken into the care of the state should be placed with NGOs rather than Community Services. (Recommendation 16.2.)

**2009** *Keep Them Safe* action plan – NSW Government commits to 111 of the 116 Wood Inquiry recommendations including those relating to out of home care, representing a \$750 million investment over five years.

**Jan 2010** *The Children Legislation Amendment (Wood Inquiry Recommendations) Act 2009*

proclaimed. Only reports that a child or young person is at "risk of significant harm" should be directed to the Community Services Child Protection Hotline. Where mandatory reporters have concerns that do not meet the significant harm threshold, they should offer and coordinate assistance to the child or young person, or make a referral.

**Mar 2010** MoU signed between AbSec and the NSW Department of Human Services, Community Services regarding Aboriginal child protection matters, establishing the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties in two *Keep Them Safe* actions – including the development of an Aboriginal child specialist advice and support model of consultation, and the establishment of four new Intensive Family Based Services in the non-government sector.

**2010** Coalition for Children in Care established to lobby for the implementation of the Wood Inquiry recommendations.

**Jan 2011** Research Report Summary: *The Cost of Support for Stable Foster Care & Adoption Placements* published.

**Aug 2011** NSW Ombudsman submits Special Report to Parliament on the *Keep Them Safe* action plan examining if Community Services' response to children at risk of harm improved as a result of *Keep Them Safe* action plan. Minister Pru Goward MP recommended the NSW Government, to transferring out of home care to the NGO sector, and reducing the number of children and young people in out of home care.

#### **NSW – a huge change with the transfer of care to NGOs**

Until recently NSW NGOs were taking on the high intense needs

children only and funded to provide wrap around services (i.e. carers' support, clinician for child case management, respite carers every fortnight and contact visits).

The recent transfer of all out of home care has involved 35 out of 37 NGOs agreeing to contract \$37,000 for each child on standard care. The funding model has five funding tiers from \$37,000 – \$88,000 / child/year depending on the needs of the child, while two tiers relate to residential care (\$176,000 – \$288,000). Agencies will determine the sort of care the child needs to allow complex needs kids to get more funding.

In 2010 the Victorian Ombudsman reviewed the out of home care sector, including NGO services. Some services were founding wanting. The Victorian department both relies on NGOs and is responsible for reviewing them, which may be a conflict of interest.

Louise Voight CEO of Bernados, interviewed on Life Matters, ABC Radio National, 21 March 2012, in relation to the Victorian review said: "We are extremely lucky in NSW, as we are the only state with an accreditation service and an accreditation requirement for agencies providing out of home care. The Children's Guardian come in annually and look at your files to see you are doing what you say you are doing. The Department is one large organisation, it can't reach accreditation, while a large number of NGOs can.

### **Working together to transition of out of home care to NGOs**

NSW NGOs working in the out of home care sector came together in 2010 to lobby for the implementation of the Wood Inquiry recommendations, in particular the transfer of out of home care services to the NGO sector. This group is now working as the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) Out of Home Care Transition Sub-Committee.

The group noted; "To effect change we need to:

- Recognise that the current system fails kids and take action to transform it.
- Recognise that in the short term, change requires investment. Over the transition period there will be additional costs, but in the long term there will be savings as numbers in care reduce (restoration, adoption, improved work with families).
- Develop a planned transition approach that makes it 'do-able'."

As reflected in the stories in this report, this transition is now well underway across NSW.

This coalition developed useful out of home care resources online, including a number of out of home care costings. These can be found at: [www.timetocare.org.au](http://www.timetocare.org.au) [www.acwa.asn.au/kts/notag.html](http://www.acwa.asn.au/kts/notag.html)

Their online documents include:

- Research report summary: the cost of support for stable foster care & adoption placements.
- Quality, caseloads and costs in out of home care.
- Coalition for children in care brief.
- Short history of out of home care.
- Briefing paper on out of home care.
- Contracting document – a new and appropriate approach to contracting.
- Kinship care resources.
- ACWA Transition of out of home care factsheets.

### **AbSec and new programs**

The NSW peak body Aboriginal Child Family and Community Care Secretariat (AbSec) and Community Services, Aboriginal Services Branch have worked together with Aboriginal out of home care services to implement new programs arising from the 2008 Wood Inquiry and the NSW *Keep Them Safe* action plan. These programs include

working towards the transition of out of home care to NGOs and some initiatives to improve early intervention services for Aboriginal children and families. These initiatives include:

- Family preservation program pilots
- Protecting Aboriginal Children Together (PACT)
- Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS).

### **Family preservation programs pilots**

May 2010: arising from the *Keeping Them Safe* action plan the NSW Minister for Community Services Linda Burney MP announced \$3.7 million over two years for five family preservation pilots for Aboriginal organisations to recruit and support Aboriginal foster carers, and support kinship placements with the aim of obtaining provisional out of home care accreditation. This funding ceases on 30 June 2012 and most of these five services are now applying to be out of home care services.

The five agencies are:

- Illawarra Aboriginal Corp
- Miyagan Aboriginal Development Corp (Griffith)
- Coffs Harbour Aboriginal Community Care Centre
- Kamilaroi Development Initiatives Aboriginal Corp (Tamworth/Armidale )
- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corp

### **Protecting Aboriginal Children Together - PACT**

The VACCA Lakidjeka ACSASS program "provides an Indigenous perspective on risk and decision making to Child Protection about the safety and well being of Aboriginal children and young people who come to their attention. Whilst all major decisions rest with Child Protection the program advocates that a child/

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young person's best interests include strong connection to Aboriginal culture, community and family. If Child Protection removes a child from their family, ACSASS seeks to support compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. (See [www.vacca.org](http://www.vacca.org))

The 2008 Wood Inquiry recommended NSW government build capacity in Aboriginal organisations to take on a role similar to the Victorian Lakidjeka ACSASS.

Following the Wood Inquiry recommendation on this model a three year PACT (Protecting Aboriginal Children Together) pilot is now underway in NSW. AbSec is coordinating the development of this project in partnership with Families and Community Services (FaCS).



Two PACT sites are: Shell Harbour (Illawarra Aboriginal Corp) and Moree (Pius X Aboriginal Corp). The PACT services will provide advice and case consultation to FaCS about reports regarding Aboriginal children and young people. PACT will also provide input into significant decisions and actions in all phases of a child protection intervention. PACT seeks to:

- Advocate and support Aboriginal children, young people and families to understand the child protection process they are involved in.
- Provide an Aboriginal perspective on the assessment of risk and safety.
- Provide advice to the department and the Children's Court.
- Support understanding and communication between children, young people and families and child protection.
- Assist child protection to engage the child's extended family and Aboriginal community members in care arrangements and decision making.

- Provide information and advice on suitable support services for the purposes of referral.

### **Intensive Family Based Services (IFBS)**

The 2008 Wood Inquiry recommended NSW government should increase the number and range of NGOs providing services to Aboriginal families. AbSec and Community Services identified four sites for a three year IFBS pilot: Wyong (Bungree Aboriginal Corp); Kempsey (Burrin Dalai); Wagga Wagga (Riverina Medical & Dental Aboriginal Corp); and Clarence Valley.

The IFBS program is based on the USA Homebuilders Model. It is an intensive 12–16 week intervention with families either at risk of having children placed into the child protection system, or as a restoration process for returning children to family or to support foster care breakdowns, working with presenting issues, not necessarily long term issues. There is a 24 hour on call service and caseworkers work up to 20 hours/week with a family. After this families work with a less intensive step-down worker for up to six months.

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## **Kerryn Boland – NSW Children's Guardian**

## **Maha Melhem – Director of Policy and Projects**

## **Wendy Lawson – Director of Accreditation**

**Requirements for out of home care services have grown rapidly over the last 20 years and government has said the services must meet certain standards. That's what we do here. The Children's Guardian accredits agencies against those standards. Government has intervened in children's lives, disconnected them from their family life and the Minister has made it her top priority.**

NSW has the highest proportion of kids in out of home care, and most of the care has been provided by government. It has been 20 years in the making but government has now agreed that children do better when cared for by community agencies. The NGO sector provides kids with better possibilities of staying connected to family and community. Government is moving full steam ahead, funding NGOs for the transfer of over 80% of children

in statutory care into the NGO sector as long as the community agencies meet standards.

Our policies have focused around foster care and small specialist residential care facilities. There is now a move into early intervention programs to divert children from formal care.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is taken extremely seriously in NSW and viewed through the advocacy of agencies including





AbSec and KARI. It's part of the legislation, with Aboriginal liaison officers across the department and support for Aboriginal agencies. They all needed accreditation or to be licensed and we went through an interesting process from Aboriginal agencies at first saying 'No,' that our criteria didn't reflect them culturally; to saying they wanted accreditation as they didn't want to be seen as providing a service that didn't need standards; to 'Yes,' wholly embracing accreditation as part of their work every day.

When accreditation came into law in 2003, services had the opportunity to go into a quality assurance program taking up to ten years to comply. Six out of eight Aboriginal NGO services have become accredited over the last five years. Some went fast, some a bit slower, some are taking longer. The strength of the agencies is that they have taken responsibilities from the government. They are now a legitimate player, not on the margins, their views are listened to.

SAFT's initial money can only be for set up, sorting out your core business, and how your funding will continue. You need a board, strategic direction, viable business model and understanding of what the government is prepared to fund. What is its priority? You now have the opportunity to develop yourselves through a focus in the out of home care area, then attract further funds for rolling out assistance for kids in various aspects of the care process. The strength of agencies in NSW is that they take on responsibility for government by looking after kids in out of home care. You need to think strategically and give

yourself maximum opportunity to be useful.

So how do you start with your business to be a real influence on government? Look to where you can be most useful and influential then add services on to this. Helping with the placement, with restoration, becoming an important part of the general process looking after families are all useful to government. If you are setting up something new, you need to go where there is an assured income, to become an available stakeholder and partner and thereby exert influence on government which makes decisions about allocation of money.

We collected data under the Wood Inquiry on how our kids are faring in government services and NGOs. Almost without exception kids do better in the NGO sector. The Wood Inquiry accepted the data and made the recommendation accordingly. However, it will be a testing time for the sector, and even the best performing agency will hit bumps over the next period. This has been a long time coming and some agencies are seeing it as a business proposition, but we do not want to encourage unfettered growth. Agencies will need to make sure they take a strategic approach about how big they can grow.

SAFT could look at our submission to the Wood Special Commission of Inquiry, for some strategic opportunities in your business plan. Different sites have different needs, it's an opportunity to partner with people, but don't duplicate their services.

Partnering with other agencies is a good option early on to leverage

off their infrastructure and use their expertise (eg. with Barnados or Life Without Barriers). Life Without Barriers have a real commitment to working with the Aboriginal community.

Develop new Aboriginal agencies where no other Aboriginal agencies exist. Pick the low hanging fruit first. Offer some capacity building service first, some family support services, then later go for out of home care services.

It will be interesting in NSW how each of the NGOs will relate to each other. Once all the dollars are out of government the onus will be on them to work together, maybe divide up who is better at what service, so look at the current services that are available. Look at where is the most guaranteed money on which you can build a

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base to do more creative things. If you start with a business on the margins you are likely to stay there so build strong base from which you can build. Start with some joint work with government. Be prepared to see your money go very quickly. You need to guarantee the stream of funding over time.

Life Without Barriers have an Australia wide enterprise. They started in 1995 in Newcastle, NSW, with some disability clients, then expanded their operations, took a business approach, saw where the money was, and developed innovative programs. Some Aboriginal

agencies like KARI are good examples of securing basic business dollars and then building innovative services around that.

Some NSW community based agencies, including Aboriginal services, find it hard to get their board to operate as an agency board, rather than a community board. Board members often have a particular community interest, but when the interest of the company becomes important their role is not to advocate for a certain group of people. People find it hard to make a transition from grass roots advocate to the long-term interest

of the organisation over time. It has been hard, maybe it takes five or six years for people to make that transition.

One of our accreditation criteria is about governance. AbSec and ACWA provided training in corporate governance, helping the services establish their objectives, checklists, helping in disputes with board members. Community members got professional ex-officio input in the board to run a larger and diverse organisation, it's a sign of their organisational maturity.

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## Dana Clarke

### CEO, Burrun Dalai Aboriginal Corporation Inc

#### Chairperson, AbSec

**In NSW we call our services 'out of home care services', not ACCAs. It's a specialised area. We (Aboriginal Out of Home Care Agencies) are the experts in NSW in Aboriginal out of home care and we have the evidence: we can place children with Aboriginal foster carers, into supportive nurturing long term placements without them leaving country or family.**

Burrun Dalai is an Aboriginal community controlled organisation in Kempsey on the mid north coast of NSW. We have one of the highest Aboriginal populations in NSW. Our main function is to provide foster care to Aboriginal children and young people in the region and support their families. Goorie Galbans Aboriginal Women's Group and the Department scoped this service as a result of the findings of the "Bringing Them Home Report" and enabled us to set up in 2000. In

2008 the Department funded us for more placements and to case manage our foster placement kids, and following the Woods Enquiry there is a larger attempt to move all Aboriginal kids and carers to Aboriginal out of home care agencies.

NSW now has out of home care accreditation through the Office of the Children's Guardian, who oversees everything we do. Burrun Dalai is now accredited and we are very proud of that as we wrote all our own policies and procedures. Accreditation was a huge effort, but it's a great process. The days where we were set up to fail are long gone – we now all know where kids are and how they are being looked after and that they maintain contact with culture, land and family. Our children's files are very good. We have to be professional, have more community controlled services and have the best outcomes for our kids.

We recruit and train Aboriginal foster carers and provide foster placements for over fifty Aboriginal children from our area. We will soon be increasing that to over 100 children. All of our carers must have at least one Aboriginal adult in the partnership – we have a strong belief that Aboriginal children should be placed with their own families or families from their own cultural groups and communities so they can maintain their connections, sense of self and their belonging. It's about connection to land, culture and how you were reared.

In the past we managed on a whistle and a prayer, but now our out of home care agencies are being funded better and we have 57 children in care and 120 carers on our books and we have recently been funded for an Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Service (AIFBS) under the Keeping Them Safe response to the Wood Report.

It's a time-limited, home-based program working with a limited number of families in crisis with children at imminent risk of placement in out of home care to safely remain with their families and community.

All our staff have the same passion – we want our kids to grow well, be proud of their culture and of who they are. Children should always be returned to family if possible. If not possible, they have to maintain connections with their families. Our staff are very stable, maybe because we are community controlled, and have a very flat organisation, with lots of consultations and nothing hidden. We sit around and talk about things, everyone has an input. Our 20 staff are Aboriginal except one, and she is married into our community. Originally we did not require qualifications, but as you build your service you build your workforce. We get people in to deliver the training and do staff appraisals where staff identify their own training needs and now we have a career path here.

We use the Barnados case management tool, LACES and the SCARF family support model and have carers working in emergency, respite, long term, with babies, with teenagers and always try to keep sibling groups together. We



currently have 120 carers on the books and we do a modified Our Carers for Our Kids foster care training intensively for three days, taking the families away. We find if you do it slowly people don't come to it all. If we take them away they finish their training and they can bring their own kids and we look after them during the training - it's a good assessment process as you can watch them with their own family.

We have had foster care services here for ten years but we haven't stopped kids coming in and we didn't just want to be another foster care agency with the word Aboriginal in front. In fact there are more kids coming in than ever because we are not doing enough early work when families first become known to statutory body, never addressed why our parents lack parenting skills. We will always need good foster carers but we feared our service was part of creating another Stolen Generation. It doesn't matter how good foster carers are, what matters is that they're not with their birth family. We're not changing anything unless we change why we're where we're at.

So we developed the Dalai Dreaming Position, encouraging kinship care and developed the Butterfly Program, an eight week parenting program about what brought you to the attention of the Department and what choices you can make to change. The family can make a plan, be invited to identify their own unique needs, only then do we do the normal parenting program work – the budgeting and the developmental milestones information etc. It's about providing for our kids to live a healthy, happy life in their communities with their people. Certainly early intervention is expensive, but per capita costing of the impact of

family dysfunction on our kids in the justice system, health system, education system, child protection system and criminal justice system compared to the cost of intervention work, says do the early intervention work. Education tries to engage the kids, but that won't work if you don't engage the kid's parents to understand the benefits of education first.

When you set up in the NT you will have to decide what services you will provide. We started with a focus on out of home care services, but it was ten years before we did early intervention work. So when do you start? The SAF,T board has to decide on a focus, don't get spread too thin with few outcomes. Nothing is impossible, but there will be big issues for people in the NT that work and live in the community when they have to do the mandatory reporting. It's a big ask.

It's a big ask for SAF,T to be a peak and a service provider in such a big area. If you are a peak how do you advocate for and support member agencies? What does the government understand to be your ACCA work? Clarify what government wants and what you can provide for the money.

The government can't ask for everything with that level of funding. Make sure it's not about being rung up about a child and then them ticking a box to say they have consulted with an Aboriginal organisation. If they are serious they need to fund it. They can't set you up to fail. Be strong. Stand up and say we need more money. Personally I think the focus should be on preventing kids coming into care - early intervention and family support, and finding out where the kids in out of home care are. After all our kids are our bright lights in our black future.

Noelene Griffen Caseworker  
OOHC & Dana Clarke CEO



Left: Bill Pritchard, AbSec CEO.  
Right: AbSec staff including Tracey Keevers-Keller (centre).

## Tracey Keevers-Keller, Manager of Projects

### AbSec

*AbSec is the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW), the peak NSW Aboriginal body providing child protection policy advice on issues affecting Aboriginal families involved in child protection and the out of home care sector.*

*AbSec was originally part of ACWA, but some Aboriginal service providers felt we needed our own organisation, and ACWA supported us to set up AbSec in 2000. AbSec is an incorporated not-for-profit Aboriginal community organisation, primarily funded by NSW Family and Community Services.*

*AbSec auspices the Aboriginal Statewide Foster Care Support Service (ASFSS) which provides telephone advice and advocacy for the carers of Aboriginal children and assists communities to establish Aboriginal foster carer support groups. We do some service provision along with being a peak body. We auspice the Stolen Generation organisation, support Aboriginal carers and non-Aboriginal carers of Aboriginal children, and support the PACT and IFBS programs. Our service doesn't run an out of home care service, it supports carers and provides resources, provides advice about child protection, and supports the transition process. We do not work directly with children.*

**I manage the AbSec training services and foster care support services including four regional positions, in far north, western, far western and southern NSW. These regional workers set up and support regional foster carer support groups. We tried other approaches to link in carers, using consultancies and volunteer carer support group coordinators, but it just didn't work. We really need the regional workers.**

Our regional staff have offices within each region, and they cover

large areas. We have monthly foster carer support meetings in all regions in NSW. This works well in some areas, one of the problems we have encountered is that FaCS has not given us carers' names and contact details, and so is responsible for sending out invitations to the foster carers for the support meeting. Sometimes these mail-outs get over looked and carers are not notified when the support meetings are held. Once a carer attends we record their details and contact them ourselves.

The number of carers coming along could be 5 or 25, it depends on the community and what is going on. The regional workers do a lot of advocacy, hear concerns and follow up on them. They have one-on-one contact with the foster carers. They have no particular case load and they don't case manage. Our regional workers are there to support the carers. We don't encourage visits to the carers' homes because of the OH&S concerns for staff working in isolation, so they meet at the regional staff offices or the park or in a coffee shop, with the kids. Our member agencies also look after the carers, and we work in partnership with them, but the AbSec regional workers mainly fill in the gaps where there are no services or where carers are with mainstream NGOs or FaCS. We source and distribute resources to carer groups, including working with FaCS to provide training. We also source and provide some training for our own member agency staff.

Our philosophy is that all Aboriginal carers are kinship carers – our community's are all related, and a lot of the carers who come to our groups are kinship carers. The kids come along to some events



where we have picnics, and all sorts of different events throughout the year, like during NAIDOC and foster care week. The regional foster carers support workers have connections and often we receive donations towards the events from local businesses.

We also support non-Aboriginal carers of Aboriginal kids so the kids can access the cultural support they need and because we clearly don't have enough Aboriginal carers. It's sometimes tricky for the non-Aboriginal carers who do turn up, there can be resentment about why the children are with them, and they don't get what everyone is talking about or feel comfortable. Communities are all different and we try to be flexible, so we are now looking at ways around this, like perhaps a group for non-Aboriginal carers only in some regions.

Our regional staff have phone meetings every month with the main office, and I go out at least every three months for face to face meetings. They all have different office space locations – in a Land Council, an Aboriginal organisation, a neighbourhood centre.

Regional workers organise the carers support groups and other community events, people come along to the community carer events, we give information to people about what it's like to be a carer. This is to support recruitment of Aboriginal carers, but we don't do the actual carer recruitment we refer to local Aboriginal agencies or FaCS. With the transition of out of home care case management we are suggesting that potential carers wait until the Aboriginal agencies are set up, this of course is only in areas that will have a agency starting in the next 12 months.

No particular qualifications are required for the regional workers other than relevant work experience – they all have been or still are carers, and most have had case

work experience in community services or other agencies. We provide them with ongoing training.

Sourcing work place training has always been a big issue for AbSec, we are having conversations with TAFE, and we have more staff coming online with the transition. Staff training is part of my position – we do personalised training plans with staff. This provides a planned approach to staff training.

AbSec are very happy with our progress – we have a transition team developing community organisations and supporting partnerships with accredited agencies to develop our sector, so we are a bit ahead of the mainstream sector. We have wanted this for a long time, Aboriginal people looking after Aboriginal kids. It will be a five to ten year process and it's going really well.

Three of the 25 staff at AbSec are non-Aboriginal people. Two of the non-Aboriginal staff are accreditation and transition workers, who support agencies with policy development to get accredited and are supporting new organisations to set up under the transition. The other non-Aboriginal worker is our bookkeeper.

AbSec is pleased we are now getting adequate services but it is still distressing how many Aboriginal kids are in out of home care in NSW – this is a terrible dilemma for us all. We are supporting the IFBS program in our member agencies, but we don't have enough early intervention services. And how much work can an organisation do when it starts? You would have to do a lot of intense needs based planning around communities.

I have set up organisations and if anything stops them succeeding it is because good management is not in place. So I would first ensure my management structure is really clear with good lines of accountability. Also look at good training

for the board and managers. It's fundamental. Ensure good policies are developed to inform your practice. Then develop the foster care support system, even if with a telephone support line first off (though phone access may be a problem in NT), it could be a start, get your name out to communities, then you can get some wins and attract money for the harder areas.

I can't speak strongly enough about our support for the accreditation process, without it we would be unable to run the services. The NSW Children's Guardian demands were onerous, but now they have come around and it has got easier, but it drills down deep into the organisation. The NT doesn't have accreditation now, but there will be a shift. Get your policies in place, so everyone is on the same page and you have that safety net for the staff, board and organisation when things come up.

AbSec has ten on our board, all CEOs from our member organisations. We want expertise on the board. It used to be only out of home care services, we now have an Aboriginal early childhood service representative and a carer member. We have core peak funding of \$460,00 per year, but that is only a small portion of our overall budget.

When AbSec began we had ex-officio members on the board for the first couple of years – specialists without voting rights, appointed, to come in to support the board in its decision making. Maybe people from other peak bodies with experience running service. It works well. People realise it's someone from outside with no vested interests, no conflict of interest, someone who can say things others can't, and someone the CEO can ring up for support. It works well.



Paul Ralph, CEO, KARI



KARI staff L-R: Kristie-Lea Curry (Out of Home Care, Administration Officer); Kylie Natividad (Out of Home Care, Project Officer); Tyson Birtles (Out of Home Care, Caseworker); Glenda Simons (Brighter Futures, Family Support Worker) (Seated); Brian deVries (Out of Home Care, Caseworker); Chad Ritchie (Community Programs, Project Officer).

## Paul Ralph, CEO,

### KARI Aboriginal Resources Inc

*KARI services south west Sydney and provides accredited Aboriginal out of home care services, coordinating the delivery of full case management to our children and young people in care and recruitment and support of Aboriginal foster carers. They provide Aboriginal advocacy and offer community programs in Aboriginal training, community unity, cultural enrichment, and Aboriginal economic empowerment.*

**It's a significant question, where do you start your business and why. What is your immediate need? Is it child and family related or purely out of home care?**

KARI was established in 1999 as a not-for-profit community organisation based at Liverpool in south west Sydney with a seeding grant of \$190,000. This enabled two of us to start built up to a \$6 million out of home care and wrap around service today with 44 staff – 80% of them Aboriginal.

Our service began with the recruiting and training of Aboriginal foster carers and the shared care of 20 Aboriginal children in care with DoCS NSW who had case management responsibilities. Today the

children remain under guardianship of the Minister, but we have full care responsibility for 120 children and young people. This number will double over the next year. The NSW Office for Children has now accredited our out of home care program for five years and we are now the largest accredited Aboriginal children's service in NSW.

Being responsible for the full case management of the children and young people allows us to be more effective in assuring culturally significant influences in our service delivery. KARI has also established an award winning health clinic for the children and young people in our out of home care program and has a complex community services program.



We all want to see the NT flourish. If KARI can help in any way I am only too glad to share what I have developed over 13 years. A lot of it is transportable, the good practice ideas and we can show you and send you our materials in a service visit.

Start small, have vision, a plan, stick to it, start a service, achieve some small successes, stay steadfast for the first five years, gain a community reputation, show you can be trusted with your service and with money.

We ensure our Board members aren't related to staff, that they understand the ten year vision and have the planning skills to achieve that vision. The Board members may not all be Aboriginal, but they

need expertise –they are on the Board because they are the right people. The same is true for the staff. Whoever you first employ must be able to do the job.

You are not going to solve the world's problems. We know we will not solve our problems in five years, but you are starting a process that will become effective. It can happen. The key important messages are to have a long-term vision and a short-term vision and develop solid building blocks on the way. Along the way build your allies and support, local community, government and build partnerships. If you have other non-Indigenous services talk to them where they can share and work with you so your costs are reduced and you learn from them.

Taking the children away is sometimes necessary, but we are getting another Stolen Generation – we have 6000 Aboriginal kids in out of home care NSW – over 33% of the kids in care. So we now have many community programs where we work with families and promote culture.

My family history traces back to Daingutti from around Kempsey and Eora of the Sydney area, but I have very strong links to La Perouse. My family was one of those placed on missions and we lost a lot of contact. I have worked in the public sector a long time and I think you need a very professional approach to running your business. Aboriginal people are here today because of past practices, but we have to progress and it's up to us to make that progression. KARI proved we could manage our funding and run a good business at the smallest level.

We have five or six Board members. If you get too many Board members it can become emotive and political. You need operations separate from governance, as organisations can be informed by poor politics which override the CEO. The CEO reports to the Board

and the Board takes actions if the job is not being done. It's about structure. KARI is lucky – we have a business plan, everyone is accountable and we don't have politics here interfering with business.

If SAFT has a ten year vision there is no reason it can't be successful, as the people are so disadvantaged, but SAFT will not be able to satisfy everybody in the very beginning. There is too much to do with too few resources. So start small and take small steps. Pick out the most important issue – is it out of home care or family support?

Develop your good business principles, choose the right staff, document and keep the data, give the data to supporters, and be honest with community – tell them you are small but intend to grow.

Start off setting the agency as the experts when it comes to Aboriginal families. Is there an opportunity to work with other NGOs in the sector?

It's not a lot of money to start. You can't provide a service straight away. It's about opening the door, getting capable managers for each section to grow that service, policies, procedures and documentation.

I would first get in consultants to do workshops, to consult and find out the local needs. Put together a twelve month business plan, basic establishment. There will be no services until the office is resourced, with people on board. Remember it's a ten-year plan, so don't expect anything in the first year.

Foster carer support, family support, intensive family support, family conferencing – you can't just do all that, it takes time and good systems in place. People will want you to solve the issues from the beginning, but if it's a serious business, the priority is in establishment.

Don't start with the difficult tasks. Start with foster care recruitment and managing a team to take

referrals. Take on managed kids and recruit the carers. There is a history here of other services, like Yorganop in WA – just get in the race. For our first five years, all we did was recruit and manage foster carers. Then we said we are ready to take on the first case management. We understood. We started with the wrap around services, and we are now working with community on lots of support programs – parents' camps, school programs – all this can come down the track, but your agency's success will be based on how you set it up in early stages. Be strong. Tell the funders: 'We are here with a long term generational plan and beyond. First we will establish the agency, so we can achieve our long term goals.'

Intensive family support is a long, consuming and arduous process. It's draining, difficult and takes all your resources. Community expectations are great, so you have to protect yourself and your staff. Pick the right staff, set the boundaries through their job descriptions, use referrals. You need to avoid having staff burn out and get upset or unwell. There are a lot who want to do more but you need to protect them and understand boundaries are important.

We have a good recruitment process; we are big on training and make sure we keep training our people so they are well equipped. Support them so they stay.

We pick the best person for the job and we know it is hard to recruit professional Aboriginal staff, so be inventive when you recruit! We created an entry position where staff can learn, we bring in a lot of outside training companies, invest money in emerging leaders, identify middle management training, have succession planning in place. We have 80% Aboriginal staff and about 22 people with Certificate 4 in Community Services – some of those are now becoming trainers.



Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre Trading As

# GREAT LAKES/MANNING ABORIGINAL CHILDRENS SERVICE



Staff L-R. Front: Debbie Ballangarry, Caseworker; Cheryl Holden, Senior Admin Officer; Nathan Theophanous, Foster Carer Recruitment, Assessment & Training Caseworker; Amanda Bridge, Manager. Middle: Corey Saunders, Caseworker; Caralyn Styche, Coordinator Out of Home Care; Rhiannon Paulson, Caseworker; Vicky Lambert, Caseworker. Back: Jeremy Long, Marungbai Aftercare Project Officer; Justin Keed, Trainee Caseworker; Mykol Paulson, Caseworker.



## Amanda Bridge

### Great Lakes / Manning Aboriginal Children Services (G.L.M.A.C.S.)

*G.L.M.A.C.S. provides casework and financial assistance to Kooris aged 15–25 who have left out of home care and where there is a legal court order. They manage 60 out of home care case placements, and this number is about to double. They do kinship care where it is statutory care. The service set up in 1988 and Amanda Bridge became coordinator in 1995.*

*Amanda said:*

**We recruit, train and assess foster carers. We have been doing this work for 17 years and now have kids that came through the foster care system at TAFE doing community services and wanting to work in our sector. There was initially a foster care service and group home in Taree. Then there was a big change from residential care to foster care, so we lost our group**

**home and made sure the foster care service got going.**

I was a youth worker at the time, I took it slowly, worked really closely with the Department, working with the DOCS case workers, and learnt how they were doing it. I saw things I liked and saw where they were going wrong and tried not repeat their mistakes. It took me a long time to get down to the community,

because you need to be clear about differences in roles and the law. But once we got some good carers on deck they did the recruitment work via word of mouth, and before I knew it people were approaching me. It's great when you start small because you can support the carers really well.

We assess people who want to be foster carers with a modified



departmental generic foster carer assessment tool, a generic foster carer training manual, and a lot of our forms are based on LAC (but not electronic), and we made it through the accreditation model. All our kids are within our nation, we have only a few placed here from out of country. We don't manage any non-Aboriginal carers so far but we are in the process of doing that under the recent changes.

I usually run training for foster carers during the week or over a couple of weekends, it depends on the people. We provide child care. You want the processes to be short and sweet, not complex. For us the gap is in kinship carer assessment.

We do not provide intensive family support. I'd like to do that, work to prevent kids coming in. There's a big gap here, there's lots of generic early intervention but few pick up the deep-seated protection concerns.

Our current funding is based on case management, and our staff manage twelve children each, which includes supporting their foster carers. DOCS have a funding formula based on our awards, and we always piggy-back on what the big agencies charge. They have good strategies, so sit down with them and get them on board, how they can cost it.

Once upon a time we were funded at a low level and had to go back to the Department for any help, you had to push and shove. Now I am in control of the money and I manage it well, but if you take it on too fast you will fail. SAF,T needs to learn the child protection system and how to stop kids going in, to learn case management. If you start as a foster care support service and sit in on case management with the Department and carers you will gradually learn the system. It's do-able, as long as you don't rush it. Get your staff trained through the Departmental staff

training program, work along side departmental staff, buddy up for a three to six months. Also spend time with other services, work with them and listen to them, learn from them about costs.

All of the NSW Aboriginal agencies started off by recruiting and supporting foster carers – we did, Burrun Dalai, Ngunya Jajum, the new agencies such as Coffs Harbour and Illawarra. It's a nice way to start. Burrun Dalai and Ngunya Jarjum have both developed all their own tools. It takes a few years, slowly but surely.

Accreditation has been my focus for five years. We have to have all our policies, procedures and forms for interim accreditation – it's all about paperwork. We used consultants to come in and write up our policies and procedures, it can be expensive, but it has been worth doing. Developing the way you do business with families and communities is different. You have to do both.

Start with supporting foster carers, build up your knowledge of case management. Provide advice to government when they need it – anything around placement they talk with us. There are now two new NSW pilots of Protecting Aboriginal Children Together based on the VACCA Lakidjeka program where they go out with them at removal notification, and we are waiting to see how it rolls out.

All our team is Aboriginal except one. People want Aboriginal case workers. It's all about cultural integrity; keeping these kids connected to community; you can't do that with white staff, it just doesn't work. I am connected with Biripi and Worimi peoples – close connections can help, though it can also make it hard. When we recruit we look for good communications, common sense and an ability to write well as there is lots of paperwork. For the rest, we will train you. We have the

ACWA work-based diploma, and we support staff to go away, on a living wage, to get their qualifications for Respond to Risk of Harm, which is compulsory (plus refreshers) if you are a mandatory reporter and in out of home care case management.

We lobbied hard through AbSec for funding to pay staff similar to government employees. That has made a difference. Around about 1995 (when we lost our group home) I started talking to Betsy Coe in Redfern Aboriginal Children's Service, to Dale McCloud in Nowra, and Garry Matthews in Coffs Harbour. We all met with senior department staff around funding equity. We still weren't getting a voice though so I joined ACWA and got those NGOs behind us, using their voice with DOCS. We finally got that equity and also formed AbSec in 2000, mentored through ACWA. But even when we got the funding we really got the respect because of AbSec leadership through Bill Pritchard – we need those people with the vision.

We don't have language problems down here, English is the main language.

Going too fast means setting up to fail, you need to think it all out, and it needs a lot of thought.

Our legal entity is an AMS. At one stage we looked at having our own entity, with local community people with health and education backgrounds and maybe a foster carer representative. If your staff are strong there are benefits to being in the AMS model, but I don't let our business get bogged in a medical model – health outcomes are just one section. You need a strong leader and could build the board up as a legalised AMS sub committee, which could become the governing body of an auspiced service.



**Lenore (Minna) Marlowe – CEO**

**Lester Moran – Manager, Case Workers**

**John Herington – Consultant**

**Ngunya Jarjum**

*Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network Inc. is a community based service. It is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people committed to improving services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families throughout the Far North Coast. In Bundjalung language Ngunya Jarjum means ‘all our children’. Lenore Marlowe (Auntie Minna) and John Herington were both involved in the establishment of Ngunya Jarjum in 1995.*

*Ngunya Jarjum provides voluntary care, crisis, short- and long-term out of home care and liaises with government and appropriate persons and organisations on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*

*Ngunya Jarjum support foster carers by initial and ongoing training and annual carers conferences; regular home visits and phone calls to find out how they are coping; helping them create local foster care support groups; a regular fortnightly allowance based on the child’s age and needs and adolescence contingency payments.*

*Ngunya Jarjum runs a Strengthening our Bundjalung Mob for our Jarjums project with early intervention camps, community education workshops and parenting programs.*

**Auntie Minna, John and Lester told us:**

Ngunya Jarjum were the first NSW Aboriginal service to be accredited for 5 years. It was a big job but really helpful, we now know where our workers are in terms of their skills and we have objective ways to measure ourselves. The NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian have moved a long way and been very flexible over our

accreditation process, so next time it will be more streamlined.

There are twice as many kids removed now as during the time of the Stolen Generations. Our method is focusing on restoration for the next ten years. You have to start to recruit and support the foster carers, that’s how it is, start now. Take the bull by the horns. We were where you were. We said we are going to do it our way.

L-R: Lenore (Minna) Marlowe, CEO; Lester Moran, Manager, Case Workers; John Herington, Consultant.

If you stall and don’t do it they will take the money. Put out a proposal, recruit carers. Just do it.

By the time the kids get here its all failed, we are doing a patch up. If you start from square one the model looks different, but if you look at the kids in care now you need to make sure the Aboriginal kids are with the best carers.

There are building blocks in developing a continuum of care model and you need a long term plan about building each block upon the last. Your service delivery is to provide out of home care services for Aboriginal children, seek to avoid Aboriginal children coming into care and empower Aboriginal people in family decision making.

We service 33 communities from Tweed to Grafton, about 10,000 people. We are funded at \$37,000 a child, we are fighting for more Care Plus 2 funding (\$47,000). We have thirteen full time staff, two part-time, but we will be putting on more soon.

Our budget is about \$2.6 million for 60 kids for case management and supporting the carers. We were attracted to the VACCA continuum of care model, and supporting

foster carers to care for kids. Our foster carer worker is struggling to support more than 35 foster carers (including the convenience carers) for 60 kids. We have 60% kinship carers and 40% foster carers. We are constantly recruiting, as often people leave or may not turn out well.

We are watching carefully with all the recent expansion arising from the Wood Inquiry. We are committed to getting the kids placed with our service but there is always a possibility of government exploiting good will, trying to make things work cheaply. We will be more than twice as big soon, building to 160 kids over next four years, that's 80–90% of the Aboriginal kids in our region with only 10% with Family and Community Services (FaCS).

#### **A new kinship care program**

All the kinship carers and the children have been transferred over from FaCS, including many non-Aboriginal kin. They have all already been assessed more or less, but we have taken them all on and will build on that for our final authorisation, as under our accreditation we can't take on others' assessments without doing our own. We have our own accredited foster carer manual and we have a new kinship model from VACCA. We have agreed with FaCS to do joint assessments using their assessment tool, pulling stuff out as we refine our

L–R: Christina, Case Worker; Janine, Team Leader; Kylie, Case Worker, Foster Care Support; Kay, Kinship Care Worker; Karen, Kinship Care Worker; Veronica, FaHCSIA Worker;

own assessment tool. We want to make one assessment tool for both kinship and general foster carers. So we are refining and adopting our own assessment tool, based on FaCS, the Benevolent Society and VACCA material. Everybody has built on everybody else, so we should all share what we have got. There are other tools around, but they are not culturally appropriate and are copyrighted.

#### **Family decision making**

We don't have the VACCA Lakidjeka model that is being trialed elsewhere in NSW (the PACT trials). The family decision making in VACCA really impressed us and we have fought to come in before the child has been removed, at the first report, the department send us a referral form. We are piloting Aboriginal Family Decision Making in Lismore without any additional funding. We have done three decision making meetings now. It complements the consultation framework and reinforces the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. When FaCS get a report we go out and co-facilitate and ensure the family knows why the kids were removed, what they have to do to get restoration and their kinship care options. This pilot will be evaluated, then rolled out further and we just have the endorsement from the FaCS regional director. This work is a massive investment of resources. It can only be done if properly resourced.

Some NGOs have also been phoning our cultural connection worker, but this position is not funded. Eventually we will provide this as fee for service if it is not

funded. We are put in this position as there will be 30 – 40 non-Aboriginal carers with Aboriginal kids coming on board and we have never had non-Aboriginal carers before.

#### **Family and cultural support work**

We get federal FaHCSIA funding of \$100,000 for Strengthening our Bundjalung Mob for our Jarjums. This funds a worker and some programs. We get community on board, run three day modules co-facilitated by Pam Greer on grief and loss, healing, domestic violence, sexual assault, physical abuse and neglect of children, and community development. We try to get as many community members as possible rather than staff from other agencies. It's door-to-door work, house-to-house – that's the only way you can promote it in Aboriginal communities, by word of mouth. We support kinship carers, hold women's gatherings, hold a kids' camp, young parents support, it's early intervention.

All our staff are Aboriginal and we have a very limited turnover. Everyone here participated in our accreditation, developing new policies, and forms. There was only 4–5 of us here at first, working weekends, it nearly killed us, but it's the commitment. We do a lot of work to keep people involved and there is ongoing staff training support, supervision, staff development days. We have crisis after crisis in this work and sometimes if we let staff issues slip then things start to fall to bits, so we have to go away and work on it.

Our staff know all the mobs, the landmarks – the Wiradjeri, Gamillaroi and Dunghutti, etc, they

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are all married in with Bundjalung, and we have had cultural care plans from Day 1. We developed our own accredited Life Story Book. We leave the book with the carers and the case workers check to see they are up to date. We have a foster carers two day long conference every year with a great teenage kids' program (which is an opportunity to talk with the kids about being in care). We hold them at seaside resort and ask the foster carers what area they want to be trained in and get in facilitators. It costs us a lot! We have 90 kids (including the carers kids), 35 foster carers, 30 kinship carers, supervisors for the kids, our staff.

Before we started there was an Aboriginal group home here, sometimes nine kids were placed at a time! The Department closed it down and the Aboriginal community decided we had to do something. We employed 1.5 staff to start doing something, and we started with foster career recruitment.

I said my vision is to take care of all the Bundjalung kids in our nation. One DOCS staff member said "In your dreams!" Well it's come to pass. We have worked hard, we are very proud of what we have accomplished!

Our next plan is to train more staff – taking on another 100 kids and unknown number of carers is a big task. We also have hope to get land and build culturally appropriate service, a residential care transitional home for older kids in foster care. Things will change, but it will always come back to our obligation to the kids here, the kids of the Bundjalung nation. We need to keep the foundation strong and remember that no one working here is bigger than Ngunya Jarjum.

**Ngunya Jarjum has shared a presentation of their Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Kinship Care Program with SAF,T.**



**Top (L-R): Michelle, Finance Manager; Lindsay, FaHACSIA Worker; Lindy, Administration Worker.**



**Bottom (L-R): Belinda, Case Worker; Jerwayne, Account Officer.**



## **Terry Chenery, CEO**

### **Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services (HACS)**

*HACS provides foster care to Aboriginal children and young people of the Hunter region around Newcastle, NSW, and supports their families. HACS started in 1984 as a sub project to the Aboriginal Legal Service.*

*The new CEO of HACS is Terry Chenery is an Anaiwan man born on Awabakal land. He has extensive experience in both the civil and criminal justice system.*

**I have only been in this position for six weeks. The main objective of the Hunter Aboriginal Children's Services is to keep Aboriginal children safe. We have 15 employee positions, doing case management with 55 kids in out of home care. This will end up with 164 over the next four or five years. We work with agencies appropriate to the kids, such as the Newcastle**

**region Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Coop, plus mainstream service providers. We work on ten children per full time case worker, but you may have siblings in one placement.**

You need a critical mass of workers who know the business. We have both case workers for the children, and a dedicated foster

care support worker and a foster care recruitment and training worker. If someone passes the carer assessment they do the Step by Step Aboriginal assessment program and a competency based training model. Once they pass the assessment, they do a Working for Children Check, which we pay for. It is imperative that case-workers



## Terri Libesman, Senior Lecturer

### University of Technology Sydney, Faculty of Law

**It's a long term and huge restoration required in the NT and it can only start in a small way. Be cautious about what claims can be made, what is feasible for a new organisation. Set up the foundation for building the capacity of SAF,T and the ACCAs. It is easy to find one or two programs that have worked well and sound good and develop them in an ad hoc way without a bigger picture but SAF,T needs to determine its long term structural objectives and develop programs that build on these. I would suggest using a self-determination and human rights framework for determining objectives and having big picture objectives of:**

- **cultural support for communities,**
- **building community norms,**
- **understanding the systemic causes of abuse and neglect,**
- **building respect for SAF,T across government and the non-government sector.**

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understand case work to the letter and have great analytical skills.

We will grow with the transfer of children and carers as the Department gives them to us, and we will grow into new areas to support the children.

All my case workers are Aboriginal, only two of my staff are non-Aboriginal, not all have qualifications, but that is not my preference. Given the number of Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal carers, our staff will have to get used to working with non-Aboriginal carers. It will be a challenge.

Our Management Committee, which usually meets monthly, consists of eight community representatives who are elected each year.

Don't be pressured to put particular programs in place. Experiences in other jurisdictions show that organisations work best when they build around their longer term goals. Don't set up everything at once, set up some things and also the framework within which other things will be established.

Within a self-determination and human rights framework there are two levels of advocacy: the individual level and the community or structural level. Keep these two levels in mind in an ongoing way. Well being has fallen by the wayside and needs to be built into the longer term SAF,T objectives. You must be constantly vigilant not to individualise neglect. Where the whole community is unsafe, emphasis must be at least equally on structural factors, a collaborative response to a break down. The other consideration is neglect arising from poverty. You need to target both.

The framework should include the formalisation of the powers SAF,T operates under, get SAF,T's roles and responsibilities formally and legislatively recognised. I would suggest not making these at the out of home care end of the spectrum. I would suggest formalizing SAF,T's roles and responsibilities a lot broader than being involved in out of home care. Include support for finding families or programs for kinship and foster carers but also build an earlier starting point with families as part of the formal responsibilities SAF,T will assume.

SAF,T has to work both with children and families at an individual level and also at a structural community level, as it will often be the whole community with an issue, not just one family. For example, in cultural care, you need to support

the general cultural well being and norms, as well as support the particular child.

Campaigns that have been successful (eg. Aboriginal Head Start education programs) were initiated through local leadership, with a strong cultural foundation. You can look at the program evidence in my International Outcomes report.

At the end of the day you have the NT Emergency Response (NTER) / Closing the Gap responses, which is addressing a lot of structural factors – not from a human rights perspective, but from an assimilationist perspective basically. The NTER has measures to address poverty and marginalisation, but from the top down and based around European standards. Policy makers need to be educated about why what SAF,T will do is similar but also fundamentally different to the service delivery that has been part of the NT intervention. A peak that sees well being related to a cultural care framework would look at the same things as the NT intervention (eg. education, health, safety and policing) but in a way that builds on the community's culture. For example so that education is reinvesting in people's identity and in their security that way.

NSW will transfer all Aboriginal children to Aboriginal organisations, but this will only work if there is a structure for expanding their capacity. If SAF,T doesn't have the resources, there is no point taking on service delivery, as the failure will become yours, people will say you don't do a good job. Always look at costs, who these children are and the cost of their needs. Aspirations need to be backed with capacity, an understanding of what capacity is needed, a program to

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achieve it, and the flexibility to evaluate it.

Only take on what you have capacity to do well. People will take your views seriously when they see your skill, insight and success working with children and families, and by experiencing your difference. Build that bridge between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations and departments and don't simply replicate mainstream – this can happen and has happened in some jurisdictions (including the USA), if the transfer is too rapid, because if things are very broken there is a lot of rebuilding needed and it's not all there to adopt.

The focus in communities where whole communities are unsafe must be at least equally on the structural factors that make it unsafe as on working with children in need. One way that children are unsafe is the breakdown of normative order where people don't comply with their own values or Western values. Collaborative response will be needed at first. Absolute poverty also makes children unsafe. Neglect is a huge factor in these cases as poverty and neglect are so tied together. But any community must also have resources to address immediate lack of safety (eg. situations of abuse and neglect). Children's individual immediate needs can never be ignored for the bigger picture, but I stress that it's really important to be continually vigilant about not individualizing neglect. If children aren't going to be placed out side their community you need something more long term than safe houses, building some kind of (out of home) care capacity in that community. Education campaigns are needed. Governance in communities also needs to be addressed – making



**Terri and friends.**

sure the situation is safe for people who want to address safety issues. So focus on communities, assess strengths, take stock of what their capacity is and the starting point to build upon. You can only achieve what is attainable. Start with consultations about the actual strengths and capacity for safety now. Also assess the basic skills needed for the ACCAs to start work, and plan how to build capacity incrementally with a ten year plan that has flexibility and capacity built in. Building capacity is money well spent.

It's always hard to show something has been successful, but you want meaningful evaluation both as an evidence base to get more money and for the participants. You need a qualitative approach about community satisfaction and a quantitative component for evidence. It would be good to put the resources in to get the information through longitudinal studies on the outcomes for children in stable care. In Manitoba there is a very extensive transfer of responsibility

for Aboriginal children to Aboriginal organisations from point of notification to out of home care. The Manitoba experience of both involving community and managing expectations from government will be as important as the implementation of service delivery.

Family group conferencing has often been really good, but there has been down sides too. There can be a failure to put in procedural protections to ensure the most vulnerable people have reasonable input where there is extended family. It's important to make sure its not just heavies in the group getting their own way while others are intimidated. Unrealistic costings can also result in an incapacity to deliver what they said they would deliver. You need to be clear in family conferencing that circumstances are very complex. You may have an intermediary that may find a way around these issues, but you cannot just rely on the personality and skill of the intermediary. You need safeguards in the system

for very vulnerable people, public protections built into the legal structure. There must be protection and testing along the way, maybe a neutral party with capacity and powers to evaluate from the outside with capacity to exclude family members external to the process.

You can't transplant any of the family group conferencing models that exist – you need to adapt one. The Aboriginal sentencing courts model could be built on, maybe a more public forum, or look at the Indian Child Welfare Act which has a lot of varied tribal courts, SAF,T could look at these applied under tribal laws and they are not all the same. Meanwhile exercise caution – family group conferencing is popular because it's reasonably cheap, but it is complex, it has limitations and needs to be done properly, I wouldn't let it just happen. In the same way I wouldn't let transfer of responsibility for children in care just happen, one has to do things properly if they're going to be done. If you take on family group conferencing, you need a formalising of that relationship.

Not many organisations have that big structural picture like VACCA does. Keep it central – this is a huge job, have a big picture and small goals that contribute to the picture. Do strategic planning for

finding money for your goals, not ad hoc picking on things. Work with organisations where there is parity and equity, as the successes you achieve with them will likely mean you take on board the perspectives of that organisation. You have to be savvy about what money you take and what will further the organisation's goals as your objectives can easily get taken over.

Try to define the issues. Who are the Aboriginal children in out of home care? Where are they being placed? What capacity do we have to support them? Who is receiving least? What does our budget give us the capacity to do? Look at the different broad groups that need cultural care, and have a longer term five or ten year plan for each of those groups. A very large number of children in the NT are out of country and in non-Aboriginal foster care, it may be good to focus on these because they are most impacted by being in out of home care. Initially choose a small group of children that can effectively be supported. Emphasise the complexity of circumstances. In the NT because families face such considerable strain you will be expecting children with more complex needs and because of remoteness, costs of providing services will be very much higher.

Emphasise that there's a huge difference in resourcing an established organization and resourcing a new organisation from scratch, government funding must reflect this.

You need strategic planning within a structural framework, placing your goals in a human rights framework. How will you get your goals funded, achieved and ensure it doesn't just last one funding round?

I hope SAF,T will take on increasing responsibilities incrementally and have a set of principles underpinning what they do. Organisations that have this framework are more successful as don't get caught up in other things, they are clear where they want to go and refuse to do functions that are not funded, and cannot be fulfilled.

Be careful not to put it in a regulatory framework, use instead a pluralised human rights framework about participation and self determination. If you have mandatory reporting by the whole community, the child protection system gets overwhelmed and doesn't operate effectively. In NSW the Wood Inquiry led to changes to mandatory reporting, it's not controversial.

I would be very happy for SAF,T to contact me about anything I can help with in their work.

*Years back I said my vision is to take care of all the Bundjalung kids in our nation. One DOCS staff member said, "In your dreams!" Well it's come to pass. We have worked hard, we are very proud of what we have accomplished!*

Lenore Marlowe – Ngunya Jarjum

# Talking with our interstate friends – learning more for our child, youth & family services

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		Page 17	Terri Libesman, Senior Lecturer, University Technology Sydney, Faculty of Law

## Companion SAF,T reports with agencies & people in Vic, WA, SA & QLD

### VIC. – Oct. 2011

- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) – Muriel Bamblett, Connie Salamone, Gwen Rogers, Julie Toohey, Heather Brooke, Fran Baird, Chrissy Mayberry, Liz Munt
- Joint meetings with VACCA and Berry Street: Muriel Bamblett, Kerry Crawford, Suzanne Cleary and Ranessa Nelson, Julian Pocock, Craig Cowie, Lisa McClung, Les Corlett, Marcus Stewart, Anita Pell, Pam Miranda, Annette Jackson
- Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) – Daryl Higgins, Elly Robinson
- Parenting Research Centre – Jan Nicholson
- Parenting Research Centre – Robyn Mildon
- Chair Victorian Child Protection Inquiry – Dorothy Scott
- Melbourne University, Social Work – Marie Connolly

- Yorganop – Dawn Wallam, Kathleen Pinkerton
- Djooraminda – Glenda Kickett
- Dept. Child Protection, AECD & West Kimberley – Jacqueline McGowan Jones
- Commissioner for Children & Young People – Michelle Scott
- Yorgum Aboriginal Corp. – Millie Penny, Lorna Alone
- Indigenous Psychologist Society – Tracey Westerman
- Aboriginal Family Law Service – Mary Clark
- Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS) – Sharron Williams
- Metropolitan Aboriginal Youth & Family Services (MAYFS) – Sharen Letton, Jasmine Tonkin, Liz Tongerie
- Nunkawarrin Yunti – Sharon Betty, Lucy Abadiezy-Bocye, Gill Harrison
- Dulwich Centre – Cheryl White, David Denborough

- (QATSICPP) – Natalie Lewis, Royden Fagan
- Indigenous Family & Child Support Service – Greg Upket
- Children of the Dreaming – Rosie Connors
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Services Coalition – Dianne Harvey
- Kummara Association – Gerald Featherstone
- Karbul Indigenous Placement Agency – Lyn Guidry
- Cape York/Gulf Remote Area Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care Advisory Association Inc (RAATSICC) – Desley Thompson
- GenX Enterprises – Mark Gebadi
- Pompokur Aboriginal Corp – Kurt Noble, Samuel Bong, Bessie Holroyd,
- Coen Wellbeing Centre – Shaun Sellwood, Marilyn Kepele, Rhys Gardiner
- Chuulanga Outstation – David Claudie
- Wuchopperen Health Service – Carlene Munro
- Remote Area Child & Youth Mental Health Service – Che Stow, Ernest Hunter
- Safe House, ACT for Kids – Kieran Smith

### W.A. & S.A. Feb 2012

- Dept. Child Protection, West Kimberley – Julieanne Davis, Leah Dolby
- Former CEO CQAICCA – Donna Kawane
- Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre – June Oscar

### Qld – April 2012

- Kalwun South East Queensland Recognised Entity & Family Support Service – Grant Williams, Debby Smith
- Indigenous Urban Health Institute – Jody Currie
- Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Child Protection Peak